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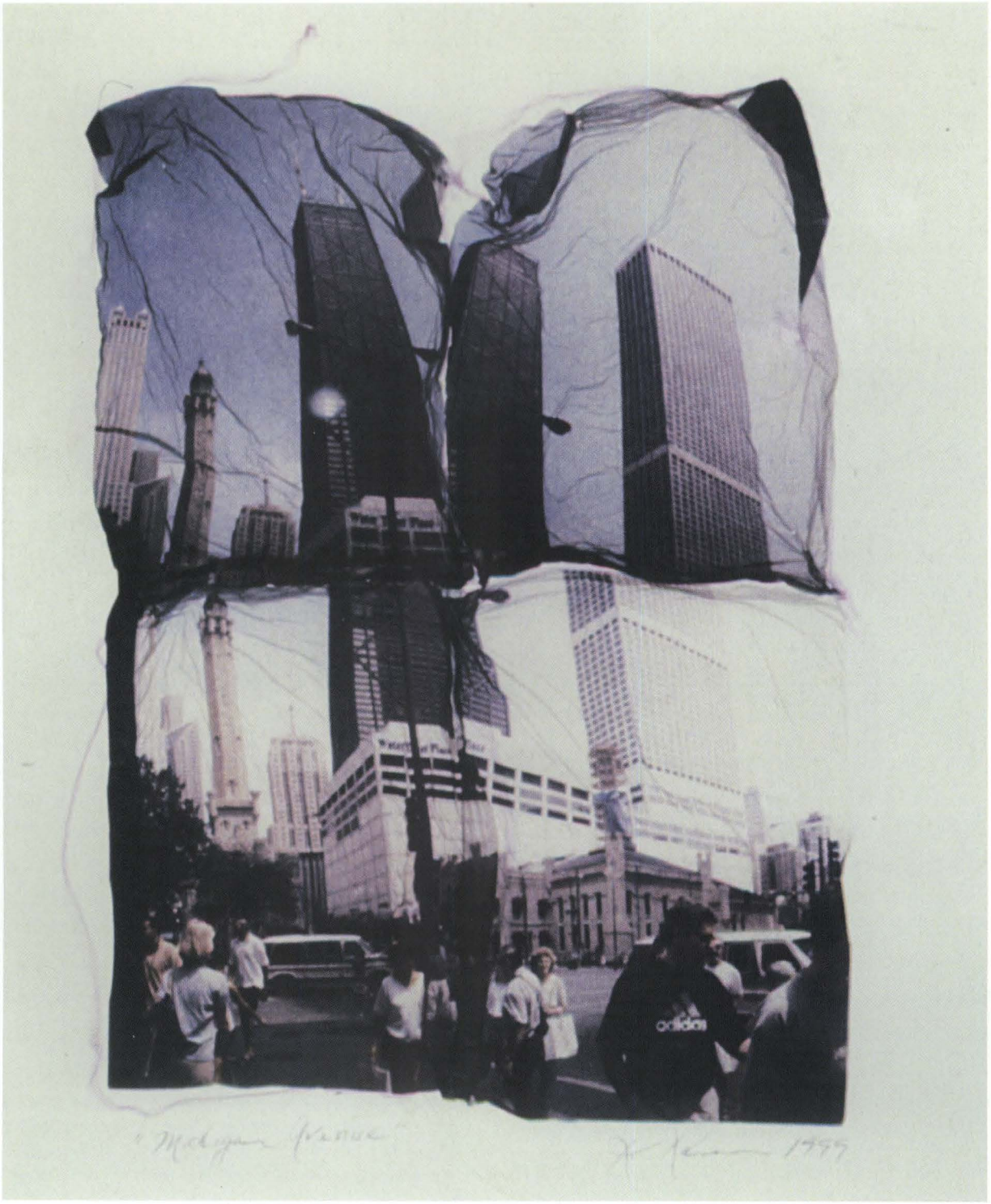

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Contents

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Back cover: Kim Karamesines, *Wrigley Building*, 1999. Polaroid emulsion lift.

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In Luce Tua

shall yet the city be the city of despair?

My grandfather was a very simple man, a mechanic and a skilled lathe operator. He was too pragmatic to have much use for religion, and he was xenophobic in principle, though radically kind and generous to any individual he actually met. I don't know that he ever drank alcohol, but I certainly never saw him without a cigarette. He was in the army during World War I, and during the next one he helped to build ships at the San Pedro yards. He grew flowers wherever he lived, and loved his country almost as much as he loved my grandmother and my mother, his only child. When I think of him, I think that in many respects, he represented absolutely the American of the first half of the twentieth century. It goes without saying that if he were to visit his country today, he'd have any number of things to greet with his quiet smile of amused interest. But when I think about what has changed in America since his death in the mid-sixties, I think that what would cause him utter amazement and dismay is what we have given up as citizens in order to fight the so-called drug war.

We have, as a nation, decided for the second time in our history to label a huge number of citizens as criminals because they use substances that several social forces have combined to convince the government to declare illegal. Such declarations appear so arbitrary as to be simply random; indeed, we can only hope that they are random, since if we consider their results, we are hard pressed not to see a clear pattern of race and class bias. As Michael Pollan wrote last fall in the *New York Times Sunday Magazine:*

> What we have here, then, is a drug war being fought on behalf of a set of distinctions—a taxonomy of chemicals that, far from being eternal or absolute, has actually been shaped by historical accident, cultural prejudice and institutional imperative. You can imagine an alternative history in which Viagra wound up on the other side of the line—had it, say, been cooked up in an uptown drug lab and sold first on the street under the name Hardy Boy.
>
> (12 Sept 1999, Section 6, p.27)

This time, unlike the period of prohibition of alcohol, the rate of criminalization and imprisonment has combined with our latent racism to give us an incarceration rate for racial minorities that is so shocking one cannot possibly examine it without wincing in shame. And, if anything could be worse, what we are willing to endure for the sake of having these numbers is worse. We condone search procedures that would have made the founders rise up in outrage—in fact, they did just that. We approve of a system of mandatory minimum sentences for possession that, since it precludes judicial discretion, would do credit to a totalitarian states. We have set up systems of confiscation of property that injure innocent people who happen to be related to people who possess illegal drugs. And because the effects of drug abuse can be so terrible and so overwhelming, we have gone on with the model of a war as our principal means for coping, though there is almost no good news from the front. We have few convincing or compelling reasons for going on fighting by means of this costly mechanism of prosecution and imprisonment, but a rhetoric of war co-opts as treason most criticisms of war as an adequate means for achieving the wholeness and health we desire.

My grandfather was a humble person, and his assets were minimal. But he considered himself wealthy in his citizenship, and in the presumption of innocence and equality and freedom from fear that citizenship conferred. I think he would be more than surprised to see the pusillanimity with which today's citizenry face the authority of law and order as soon as the term "drugs" is invoked. He would be sad to see the corresponding and predictable reaction of distrust and contempt for government growing in our society as the drug war grinds on. When we look around us at daily events where citizens interact with their government, we ought to be shocked at the degree to which agencies of our government use deception, coercion, and excessive force against us today. Yet, because these actions are labelled "war," no one in public life seems to have the will to speak against them.

Here again, the critical term is "us." White communities still agree that those who possess illegal drugs and are thus subject to intrusive police actions, prosecution, and imprisonment are not us but "them." Churches work hard to have any real impact on the lives of their parishioners, and drug users seem not to rank very high in the lists of the helpless who need care instead of punishment. Where are the comments from within the churchly community about caring for people whose addictions are to illegal substances, and about protecting these people from the excesses of power used against them? I have not heard of adult forums or study circles or other forms of education for people in churches about the role of illegal drugs in promoting the enormous increase in prison population which is behind one of the fastest growing segments of our booming economy. (One place to start with such a study is journalist Mike Gray's *Drug Crazy*, published in 1999 in paper by Routledge. This book includes a thorough guide to website information on all sides of the issues connected with drugs in the US.)

This month's covers are images of the City. They speak powerfully of several truths about cities: concrete versions of humanity's pride and power, composed of multiple, fragile elements. Though the City's buildings intend to present statements about absoluteness and identity, they easily fragment into unknowable phantasms, supported from below by the irreducible sturdy factuality of the individuals who walk around in their shadows. If Jean Bethke Elshtain is right in the assertions that form her argument in the essay beginning on page 7, we who are humans in the likeness of God dare not simply walk away from the City, from those locations—urban, rural or suburban—where human interactions make society. Acknowledging that our actions in the cities of earth are only partial, we must take seriously an injunction to be salt in the world. I find it hard to imagine how and when we in churches and schools are going to have the courage to begin to say what we must to the society we live in, given our propensity for fiddling around with minor internal housekeeping details. We should at least start to talk among ourselves about whether a war is the right or best thing to do about the problems drugs cause us.

It cannot be wrong to love your country and to honor your government. I learned that from my grandfather. But from my father, another principle, founded on good authority: Love desires the perfection of its object. We can be about the business of perfecting our society, even while we know that perfection is not attainable. Perhaps we begin by asking ourselves how to reconcile a dilemma: we have a society premised on each person's right to pursue happiness, yet a government that strenuously prohibits some (though not all) of the means used in that pursuit. We could enter compellingly into the public square with winning examples of religious principles modifying definitions of happiness; we might try to embody the experience of virtue and community responsibility *as* happiness. We certainly need to make more just and cautious distinctions among the kinds of things that make people happy. We could question the rigor and stridency of those who insist that the drug war must be fought—we could follow the money, for example. More than anything else, we have to find ourselves on this battlefield, among the victims. We won't see the drug war clearly until we see ourselves there.

Peace,

GME

Y2KL

why be a Lutheran in the new millennium?

Ezekiel Gebissa

It may sound too elementary, too obvious, and overly simplistic to say that I am a Lutheran because it is the faith of my fathers. Yet I intend to remain so even if it means being ridiculous, unfashionable, and entirely out of step with the expectations and the norms of the third millennium. There is more to what I mean by my fathers' faith than a mere preservation of one's ancestral religion. I became a Lutheran by birth rather than by volition; I am a Lutheran now by my own choice because being a Lutheran today gives me freedom from the weight of a host of questions of life for which I have no answers. The millennium is apparently commencing with an increased global awareness that freedom is a natural right of individuals and no earthly power has the monopoly to dispense it. Thus, the fashionable thing for me to do in the next millennium concerning matters of faith would be to turn away from the faith of my fathers. However, owing to the freedom that faith has granted me, I find that doing so is unwise and impossible.

The previous millennium was one of revolutionary changes, of the rise and fall of radical ideologies, of destructive wars, and of the exploitation of one human being by another. I expect with a feeling of anticipatory exuberance that the third millennium will be marked by the triumph of human freedom from all kinds of bondage. The evidence is all around us. In the last fifty years of the last century of the millennium, the tide of history has turned against the vices of the receding millennium. The idea of freedom has caught on. People the world over have become aware of the rewards of personal freedom and the quest for it is growing by the day.

It would be wrong for me to forget that freedom is the foundation of the faith handed down to me by my forefathers of faith. For me, it begins with Jesus, Paul and Luther. Then it becomes even more personal, literal, and homely. Jesus launched his ministry with a message of freedom. One Saturday morning he went to a synagogue, unrolled the scroll of the prophet Isaiah and read the following passage: "[God] has sent me to proclaim *freedom* for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Echoing Jesus, the apostle Paul admonished the Colossians to not let anyone take them "captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human traditions and the basic principles of this day." Indeed when Martin Luther was asked to recant his revelation that justification was by grace through faith, he chose to stick to the freedom that the truth he had received had granted him rather than accept human authority. His defiance could have meant imprisonment or even death, but his other choice would have meant turning his back on the truth that the beginner and perfecter of his faith had revealed to him.

Submitting to human authority would have meant avoiding momentary danger while remaining a prisoner of conscience for not clinging to the revealed truth. I can imagine the sense of relief, satisfaction, and freedom Luther felt when he, after years of soul-searching, found out that the traditions he was called on to observe in order to be saved were just human demands, not divine ordinances. For those who followed him, Luther's new teaching meant primarily freedom for the soul from sin, but also freedom of the human mind from the shackles of tradition and human authority. That freedom ushered in a new era of life in world history. This is the foundation of my faith. Deviating from such a firm foundation makes no sense.

The issue of freedom also serves me as a guide in how I practice my faith. The church where I accepted Christ as my personal savior, the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY),

Ezekiel Gebissa closes our series on the Why be Lutheran question. He is a professor for the Kettering Institute in East Lansing, MI.

the largest Lutheran church in Ethiopia, is founded on the scriptural principle of serving the whole person, that is, serving the spiritual and material needs of a person. I grew up learning that my fellow human beings have needs and Christ's followers have the obligation of faith to proclaim freedom for those who suffer from spiritual and material deprivation. If the goal of my faith is to take part in the kingdom of God, which is among us today, then I must do what Jesus instructed me to do: love my fellow human being and do my best to serve those who are in need. If I practice my faith on the basis of this simple, straightforward principle, I know the Lord will say to me, "enter, good servant, you have fed me when I was hungry, clothed me when I was thirsty. . . ." It is that simple, and knowing it gives me the freedom to go out and proclaim freedom to those who are in bondage. Christ has set me free to do good and I have no unanswered question concerning what to do to be the free person Christ has made me.

I am a Lutheran because it is a faith that brought freedom to me in a literal sense. My great grandfather was a slave who was sold four times before he was purchased by a Swedish Lutheran missionary who was residing in the mid-nineteenth century in the Red Sea province of Ethiopia. The missionary liberated, taught, and baptized my grandfather as a Christian, thus marking the beginning of the EECMY. The freed slave studied theology in a seminary in Lund, Sweden, returned to Ethiopia, and went on to become a missionary dedicated to bringing the Gospel to his own people. Among his legacies was the translation of the Bible into the Oromo language, one of the most widely spoken languages in Africa. By accomplishing this task, my great-grandfather brought freedom to millions of Oromo compatriots in Ethiopia from the darkness of not knowing Christ, the shackles of illiteracy and from the uncertainties of a meaningless life.

Because being a Lutheran has guided me and served me well in the past, I am confident that remaining so would serve me well today and in the future. I cannot imagine what life will be like in the next millennium or how much more we will be able to know about the natural world. But I am sure that there will be a plethora of new finds and discoveries that will raise what I hold to be the truth about the universe, the idea of God and the nature, purpose, and destiny of human beings. Science has repeatedly overturned explanations about the nature of the cosmos. I already have numerous unanswered questions about the cosmos, the final destiny of mankind, and even the nature of God. Super-computers may produce an explosion of new scientific knowledge that may once again revolutionize our present conception of the universe. A new discovery, comparable to the Copernican Revolution of the sixteenth century, might require revising what I have thus far believed about the universe and how it was created. This may very well happen in the next millennium. We seem poised to enter the third millennium with the opportunity to design human beings and a more conducive atmosphere for man to play God. The question is how prepared I am to withstand the ensuing assault on my faith.

Needless to say some persons dismiss my questions with simplistic responses. Seeking light on my intellectual questions, I have held conversations with my fellow Christians. My friends are ready to accept simple answers and are content with quick and easy explanations even though they are often unsatisfactory. Hoping to get a better instruction, I took part in worship services at some popular, modern-type churches that my friends attend. There, even my questions were not entertained. I was told essentially to ignore my mind. Instead I was instructed to command prosperity and happiness to come my way. The offer of miraculous life was nice and fantastic, but my mind will not settle for facile answers that border on magic and divination. Far from answering my original queries, such answers have given rise to a dozen new questions.

Being a Lutheran has not provided me with a satisfactory answer for every nagging question of life, but it gives me freedom from the pressures of those questions by assuring me that the grace of God is sufficient for me. The faith of my fathers gives me a sense of freedom that the modern-type, more energetic and vivacious Christian churches cannot. Being a Lutheran makes me satisfied with what I know about God, allows me to rest in the provisions of grace, and brings me into fellowship with my spiritual ancestors for whom knowing God was serving their fellow human being. It gives me freedom from false promises, empty expectations and the disappointment of failure. Being a Lutheran brings me, by God's grace, into God's nearer presence, where life will finally be unhindered, unbounded, and free.

What Does It Mean To Take Washington, D.C. Seriously?

Jean Bethke Elshtain

I hear the querulous response now. Take Washington, D. C. seriously? You've got to be kidding. Or, alternatively: Take Washington, D. C. seriously? You bet I do. The less I have to do with Washington the better. You know the old saw, don't you? The one about the most feared sentence in the English language being: "Hello, I'm from the government and I've come to help you." Thanks, but no thanks.

I understand this attitude but I lament it, at least in part. I do believe that skepticism about the aims and claims of the sovereign state is the beginning of political wisdom, but it is only a beginning. If we begin and end with skepticism, we invite a thorough-going withdrawal from politics and that is both a pity and a shame. A pity because Christians are bidden to act as salt and light of the world. And if the salt has lost its savor, then what? A pity because we have a responsibility to act in common together toward cherished ends—and by that I don't mean conniving at getting the most advantageous tax break or the like but, rather, those ends that only the experience of living together with others affords us. Scripture warns us about making an idol of any limited human configuration, whether families or states. But, from the strength that membership in the body of Christ on earth affords, we are called to go into the world, a pilgrim people, and to do what we can to protect and to defend—and I will cast this in today's dominant political language—a vision of human rights that most comports with our understanding of persons as intrinsically social and as dignified, created in the image of God.

This lecture was given in January 2000, part of the observance of Valpo's 75 years of Lutheran ownership. If the traditional question involves Jerusalem and Athens, what happens when we bring Washington D.C. into the picture?

Some say that politics is the worst possible way to protect these goods, particularly a politics that has as its focal point Washington, D.C., that great imperial city, that seething vortex of power and privilege. I suggest that we think again and I ask you to walk along with me for the next half hour or so as I try to make a limited claim in behalf of politics, including the politics that culminates in our nation's capital. I tell my students from time to time: you might not be interested in politics. But politics is interested in you. Whether you like it or not you—all of you, but I address myself most especially to the students here today—are the subjects of politics. St. Augustine taught us, in effect, that we are always in the empire, always in a political configuration of some sort. Any other possibility awaits the end-time. So what is our stance *vis a vis* this politics? Do we ignore it utterly and wish it away? That is wishful thinking of a sort that can become, and all too often has been, utterly corrupting: think, if you will, of those "good Germans" who said in the aftermath of World War II: "But we were not political. What happened was terrible but there was nothing we could have done." We do not accept such demurrals at face value and for good reason, one being that we have the life and witness of Dietrich Bonhoeffer before us, that twentieth century martyr to the theology of the cross who said that the Christian must stand with those being hunted, haunted, wounded and destroyed, the least among us at any given point in time, the bleeding brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ. We do not accept such demurrals because we have before us the story of the village of Le Chambon sur Lignon, a Protestant commune not in Germany but in a kind of extension of it—occupied France—that, to the man, woman, and child, opened its doors to hounded Jewish refugees from Nazi Germany, protected and succored these wounded and helped them to escape to neutral territory. When asked what moral philosophy drove them to such dangerous deeds of goodness, the Chambonnais simply said it was an obligation of neighbor-love, that when a starving, frightened person knocks on your door you are bidden to say, "Come in, and again, come in." Politics is most definitely interested in you. How do you respond?

I would argue that the greater our civic freedoms, the more expansive our responsibilities.

We have wider scope for action. But we find that the overwhelming majority of college students today—some 73 percent in fact—are not interested in voting in or taking part in politics, according to a report in the January 12, 2000, *New York Times*; indeed only 25 percent said they would consider time in politics even as 64 percent indicated they would consider spending some of their lives working in education and 63 percent claimed that they would work for a nonprofit group. Many of the students who expressed most vehemently a disdain for politics also said they did want to give their time to help the homeless, to tutor children, and to clean up polluted streams—but they didn't regard this as political. Many of the students interviewed offered what the *Times* called a "caustic view" of politics. Why? Politics, they said, was negative and hypocritical—more or less in this vein. Here we have some good news and some bad news. The good news is the preparedness to put one's shoulders to the wheel in behalf of service to others. The bad news is that politics is not seen as furthering such "common good" ends and aims but, rather, standing in the way of such. This latter view takes skepticism of state power, the beginning of political wisdom, and makes it the whole as the skepticism turns into cynicism. This is unfortunate. For politics is the primary way we, in a pluralistic society, have of engaging those who are similar to us in so many ways—they, too, are human persons with human desires and fears—but who are different in so many other ways—by religious commitment, ethnic background, race, region, all the many ways people can differ one from the other. Politics is the best way limited creatures like ourselves have found to negotiate these differences, not by hiding them and effacing them but by making them manifest in a way that permits such differences to remain as differences but not to turn into destructive divisions.

In a book called *Democracy on Trial*, published five years ago, I argued that we were in danger of losing democratic civil society because we had come to spurn those institutional forms and matrices that enable us to negotiate our differences and to mediate them in civil and political ways. I am all for what we usually call "volunteer work." But how do we sustain such engagements over the long haul? Our churches do much of the civic heavy lifting here. But what happens in D. C. helps to determine whether or not such work will be assisted in some way from the centers of power or blocked. How government helps to order economic life, for example, determines something quite basic: how many hours a day a person has to spend in the labor force. For government regulates matters such as length of the work day, minimum wage, whether or not there is a lopsided tax burden borne by some (married couples with children, for example) compared to others, whether or not there are lopsided benefits that flow to some by comparison to others, on and on. Issues of fair employment, housing, opportunity, whether a child-rearing couple lives on the razor's edge of social and economic catastrophe, whether or not the elderly cower in isolation and penury—much, not all, but much of this flows from what government, which acts, after all, in all our names whether we like it or not, is doing or not doing, as the case may be.

The early Christians had to conjure with this matter of whether to engage or to withdraw. St. Augustine, in his famous discussion of whether or not a Christian should take on the vocation of the judge, given the miseries attendant upon that vocation, argued that surely we were obliged in such matters, that we were not to evade or to avoid such responsibilities to and for that "empire" into which we had been thrust and which always pressed in on us from all sides. There are many reasons for our current civic desuetude. I want to reference one that is a really lousy reason and argue that Christians, above all, are called to repudiate the reasoning that goes into arguments from what is usually called "self interest" or, more colloquially, looking out for number 1, the favorite American pastime at present.

There is a direct relationship between the atrophy of our civic habits and the run-away triumph of a view of rights that construes rights as a way we have found to turn whatever we want into a claim on a body politic that we then spurn when it makes any direct claims on our time and attention. Our dominant image of the rights-bearing individual is precisely that—an individual, sovereign, free-standing—rather than a person construed in the image of God, relational therefore and, before God not at all sovereign. We think of rights as possessions. But rights historically were a way persons found of underscoring a God-given dignity that no confirguration of power could take away and that no configuration of power should violate. Rights located us in a world of others rather than pitting us against one another in relationships of suspicion and competitive self-interest.

As this more social understanding of rights withered, our civic habits also went into hiding. We abandoned the ground of human personhood and occupied the ground of sovereign individualism. This is reflected in so many ways, including a weakening in the ties that bind in our religious communities as well. Religious entrepreneurialism now holds sway and individualistic forms of "spiritualism" are embraced by contrast to membership that binds us to one another and makes claims on us. One reason, I believe, that we are so hostile toward Washington is that we feel so powerless when we think of such forbidding concentrations of power. One reason we feel so powerless is that we see ourselves as standing alone—all alone with our rights, so to speak. We lose the strength that membership provides—a strength that helps us to perdure over the long haul, as communicants of our churches and as citizens of our polity.

In his important book on *Reinhold Niebuhr and Christian Realism*, Robin Lovin offers up a defense of politics from a Christian realist perspective he associates with Niebuhr and with Augustine. It is not, therefore, a view that gives politics primacy among human activities but it is a view that, recognizing the inescapability of politics, calls upon us to engage the world of politics faithfully. How so? Here is his argument, one that I would like to associate myself with in large part. Lovin reasons thus: Christians are in a world with people who share that world but who may not share their faith, or not share it fully if we are thinking about the multiplicity of ways people locate themselves as "Christians." Politics confronts us with intransigent "otherness," people with their own opinions who are just as indefatigable in expressing those opinions as we may be in expressing our own. Politics requires that I "respond to this other in some concrete way, modifying my practices and maybe even my beliefs in ways that take this specific otherness into account." Politics is a world of compromise, for example, not as a sense of sordid complicity in awful things but as a kind of co-promising: I will do this as you do this and together we will each get something of what we find valuable, important, maybe even essential to our well-being. Politics is a world of conflicts and oppositions and that, too, may make us—in today's overused vocabulary—uncomfortable. Well, our Lord surely did a good bit to create major discomfiture. Why should Christians, of all people, shun the tough issues that are bound to raise hackles? We have been so overtaken by a sentimentalized notion of compassion—as never saying anything to make anyone else uncomfortable—that we have forgotten how to be faithful witnesses. St. Augustine, again, is a vital voice here: neighbor-love also invites loving reproof and correction and, correlatively, means we open ourselves to such as well.

We do not know, in advance of actually engaging with others, how and in what ways we will be called upon, in Augustinian language, to press them and the ways they, in turn, will press us. This is a deeply dialogical and dialectical business. Others, in a sense, supplement our necessarily partial and incomplete perspectives: we are finite, not infinite, after all. We are not omniscient. We can know only so much and the "so much" we know may be different from the "so much" others have to offer us. Think, for example, of that process of social learning that made all of us mightily uncomfortable called the civil rights movement. The order of *de jure* segregation was what Augustine would call a "false peace," a peace of disordered passions and injustice. Disturbing the peace was the only way to alter that terrible situation. The churches were central disturbers but to get changes in the law and enforcement of those changes required politics.

Surely the fight against segregation was an expression of the great wisdom that "ye shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free:" the truth of a civic brotherhood and sisterhood, in this instance, and a vision of a human political community that more closely comports with Christian understanding of our creation in God's image, our dignity as persons. To be sure, the realization of this vision is bound to be flawed and imperfect—because we are—but that is no reason to flee from the engagement. Politics is a world of engagement with, and within, limits, yes. But politics is also called, again in Lovin's words, to gather together persons within a "particular geographical area and to create a 'workable community' out of this diverse human material." Augustine struggled with how best to define this community. He rejected the definition of civic life offered up by Scipio as quoted by Cicero, namely, the conclusion that a people is a "multitude united in association by a common sense of right and a community of interest." This is a penurious understanding, Augustine claims, and he goes on to offer up his alternative, one in which love of God and love of

neighbor move center stage. "A people is the association of a multitude of rational beings united by a common agreement on the objects of their love." It follows that to "observe the character of a people we must examine the objects of its love." If we love justice as *justicia*, a form of right ordering, that is a love worthy of binding us together. But suppose what unites us is a love of self-interest and its magnification of the sort I submit we are in the midst of at present—caught up in a bubble defined by how well Nasdaq and the New York Stock Exchange are doing on any given day. This impoverished understanding of what binds us impoverishes us as human subjects, in turn. We can scarcely love our neighbor if we are out to make a killing at his expense. Let there be no doubt about it: there are always winners and losers. Trickle down economics may work up to a point. But the trickle dwindles to a few drops and dries up altogether before it gets to all too many among us. The growing gap between the many who do well or better within this bubble—one that is bound to burst sooner or later—and the tens of thousands (a minority but a substantial minority) who do not, is growing. And that helps to erode the delicate filaments of commonality as well: it is harder for us to see what we have in common with one another if huge gulfs divide us.

There are those within the Christian community who make powerful arguments that the task of Christians is to witness to the truth but not in a political way. They downgrade the tasks of magistracy that Augustine insists we are obliged to take up. These are seen as unworthy by contrast to the mission of offering up a pure witness to the world. The problem with such a stance is that it becomes arrogant: if all the engagements with the world that take place in and through politics are construed as fit only for those with a lower or lesser calling, those with "dirty hands." As for us, so this argument too often suggests, we are above the fray, ongoingly judging it without taking up the burdens of free responsibility for this state of things in any substantial way. This can lead to what Bonhoeffer calls "cheap grace," the sort displayed by one he labels the "man of virtue" who flees from engagement with the world. From *Letters and Papers from Prison*, here is Bonhoeffer, mincing no words: "Here and there people flee from public altercation into the sanctuary of private *virtuousness*. But anyone who does this must shut his mouth and his eyes to the injustice around him. Only at the cost of self-deception can he keep himself pure from the contamination arising from responsible action. In spite of all that he does, what he leaves undone will rob him of his peace of mind." An obligation that falls upon Christians as citizens is to advance a more capacious and generous understanding of both Christianity and politics than one that preaches a form of private or group virtue, by contrast to the sullied majority of us, on the one hand, or one that has only a narrow politics of self-interest to offer and to demand to be represented in Washington, D. C., on the other. I believe we do get the kind of representation we deserve, for the most part, up to and including the shameless behavior of the current President of the United States who treated the White House as a singles bar, demanding staff support in so doing. We need to think about the quality of mind and heart and spirit of those called by us to act in our behalf. Because we seem to have decided tacitly that politics is about delivering the goodies and political leadership has nothing whatsoever to do with the quality of heart, mind, and spirit of those who occupy positions of political power—so long as those bells clang happily at closing hour on Wall Street—we have acquiesced in severely restricting "the scope of political discourse."

Again, Lovin: "If politics avoids the potentially divisive question of what our humanity requires of us, it cannot discuss truth and excellence. It cannot try to persuade us to want something different from what we already want, cannot tell us that we would be better people if we did." A politics of "instrumental goods" is a politics that cannot help to make manifest what Lincoln called "the better angels of our nature." We seem to have succeeded all too well in stifling dissent "by creating a narcissistic culture, in which people do not care what happens to their neighbors. . ." Now: I mentioned at the outset the number of college students called to neighbor- love and service. But when asked why they are doing this they falter. It "makes me feel good," they say. I "feel better about myself." If we cannot do better than that in characterizing our own neighborly impulses, I submit that these impulses will gradually wither on the vine as the pressures of economic life overtake us once we depart the hallowed halls of ivy and enter what is sometimes called "the real world." A few final words from Lovin: "In its divided and sometimes chaotic reality, politics is the best approximation we have of a community of discourse in which our ideas about the human good could

be tested against all the real human beings that the ideas are about. . . .Only when we understand politics in those terms can we avoid reducing it to an instrument by which we gain our ends at the expense of others who are less skilled in manipulating the system."

Let us assume that we have embraced the claim on us to be salt and light to the world. We are pilgrims in "our empire." How do we try to make more generous what it means to embody our status as God's creatures, made to serve Him wittily "in the tangle of our minds." There are some specific cultural-political tasks I would like to lift up for your consideration. I can offer only brief intimations of each of these tasks. I lay them out more fully in a forthcoming book called *Who Are We?* (So, of course, I would like to urge you to look for the book when it appears in March.)

These principles involve responsible action and forthright engagement with the world. I am not suggesting public policies here or even hinting that there are definitive resolutions to the matters I shall put before you. These tasks involve engagement with others that will often have an edge of conflict of the sort that aims to open up debate, not shut it down; that aims to prick people's consciences and to call forth our clearest thoughts rather than to shut down our moral instincts and drive us into nostrums and ideology.

First, those poised delicately between *contra mundum* and *amor mundi* must insist that we name things accurately and appropriately. This is vital because one extraordinary sign of our times is a process of radical alteration in language, understanding, and meaning. We are painfully aware of what happens when totalitarian regimes have the power to control language and to cover mass murder with the rhetoric of improvement of the race or ridding a nation of vicious class enemies. Even mercy and compassion get dragged into it if one recalls the National Socialist regime's effort to rid Germany of persons with disabilities and inherited diseases or ailments. But we are much less attuned to distortion in our own language. Think, for example, of the language deployed by the so-called "right to die" effort, one that deploys the dominant terms of our culture's discourse—compassion (let's end suffering now) and rights. The notorious Dr. Kevorkian, in common with a good many others, rails against those who refuse to take on board his insistence that people should have a "right" to kill themselves and to have medical assistance in doing so, whenever they see fit. Kevorkian's philosophy is the most crude utilitarianism imaginable. Indeed, he sees assisted suicide and euthanasia as stalking horses "for a wider social vision of routine experimentation upon dying people and walk-in municipal suicide centers where the ill and merely disgruntled will be helped at public expense to shuffle off this mortal coil. These will be manned by salaried specialists in death called obitriatists who practice patholysis, the dissolution of all suffering," this according to a detailed report from the *Independent* of London. He also argues for experimentation on the bodies of prisoners condemned to execution—they are going to die anyway, so why not? Once in a while we really are on a slippery slope. If we have embraced the view that we are all alone with our "rights" —having denied relational personhood—why should we be queasy about exercising that "right" alone at the end, in a van parked in a parking lot somewhere with the bodies that are the end product being dumped on the doorsteps of hospitals or left for the police to find. There are many ways to ill-dignify the bodies of the ill and dying, and this is surely one. Yet, as a culture, we seem to have ceded the high ground to those who use the language of rights and compassion to these distorted ends. Let's take back the language! This is a civic task of the most exigent importance. Let's think of more effective ways to minister to the bodies of the dying and to remind our fellow citizens that rights are not possessions of utterly alone selves but are intrinsically relational. Politics must not be permitted to succumb to such crassly utilitarian horrors.

Second, those engaging the world from a Christian stance must ongoingly witness to incarnational being-in-the world. We are called to cultivate citizens who make visible before the world the fullness, dignity, and wonder of creation; the horror, then, at its wanton destruction. This sounds mysterious but it isn't. Modern deadness is all around us—the conviction that the world is so much matter to manipulate; that abstract signs and symbols entirely of our own creation that can be sent whirring round the globe in milliseconds are the reality that counts; and that individuation as a kind of radical aloneness simply is the human condition. The incarnational moment reasserts itself as part of what the Pontifical Academy for Life calls an "authentic culture of life, which should. . . accept the reality of the finiteness and natural limits of earthly life. Only in this way can death not

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be reduced to a merely clinical event or be deprived of its personal and social dimension." I submit that in the depths of our being, we know this. It is an awareness that our culture is clouding over but it reappears as phantoms and hauntings. We know that people deserve dignified treatment as a constitutive feature of life's pilgrimage. We know that everyone is someone's mother, father, son, daughter, wife, husband, child, grandparent, friend, those by whom we should be accompanied as we move through life toward death within a surround that speaks to our dignity as persons. This we cannot allow a culture—our culture—to forget.

Finally, citizens who are Christian and called, therefore, to witness and to live in hope must assure that their churches play a critical role as interpreters of the culture to the culture. There are few such interpretive public sites available in this era of media saturation. Now: you cannot engage the culture if, in common with too many contemporary culture critics, you loathe and despise it, or have given up hope for it entirely. If at one point in our culture, this denunciatory tack was the purview of the political left with its hatred of all things "Amerikan"—spelled with a "k"—now such voices are more frequently heard coming from right of center. America is construed as one seething fleshpot ready to implode. But if the culture were really beyond redemption, it would cast doubts on creation itself and its goodness: surely that cannot be bleached out entirely. Think here of the horror of the Columbine High School massacres and the shocked lamentations that succeeded it—proof positive, to some, that young people were going to hell. Two young men were in hell, that's for sure, captured by the darkness and representations of evil and they struck out, apparently targeting explicitly students who voiced their belief in God. Some of those wounded and killed were shot because they were carrying Bibles or said they believed in God, at least so many eye-and ear-witnesses—and survivors—tell us. Who can imagine such courage under such terrible circumstances? Recall as well what so many students did during the course of the massacre and after: at risk to their own lives they ushered frantic and paralyzed classmates to safety. (This is how one young man died.) They struggled to keep their coach and teacher, Dave Sanders, alive, staunching his wounds with their torn t-shirts, fashioning a stretcher from table legs, and when it was clear he was bleeding to death they held him and prayed with and for him and showed him pictures of his family. They loved and cared for one another. In the aftermath, they put up signs and crosses and offered prayers and devout promises to help rebuild a community that would constitute a living memorial to their classmates who had perished.

This is, to put it bluntly, a hell of a thing for kids to go through. But the way in which these young people went through it should help us to savor living hope rather than to dwell exclusively on the violence and to lament all things adolescent. It should also forestall a triumphalist tone from churches and the Christian community for that is not the sort of engagement that actually engages —it leads our fellow citizens, as troubled and perplexed as we are—to flee the opposite direction.

We seem to be very far way indeed from Washington, D. C. Yes and no. If civic life is about how we order a way of life in common together, the cultural moments I have noted are at the heart of the matter, not at the periphery. What can D. C. do or not do? There are many things we could forebear from doing—I mentioned questions of economic and tax policy at the beginning—that now virtually guarantee that people are drawn away from their families and communities. There are many things we could do and that require cultural, civic initiatives and government action, including regulation of virtually unregulated industries. Why is it "censorship" to build in incentives and disincentives to turn the media giants away from their absorption with violence and throw-away relationships and sex disconnected from any notion of respect for the bodies of others? Surely as a culture we can find ways of altering the framework and the surround that presses in on us all, but most heavily on overburdened parents and teachers, those charged with the tasks of formation most directly.

I am out of time and I have only scratched the surface. I hope I have said enough to convince you that although you might not be interested in politics it is very interested in you. How do you respond? Through a flight into that virtuousness Bonhoeffer called spurious ? Or through faithful engagement at the risk of dirtying one's hands a bit with the messy task of caring for the world into which you have been born and which you cannot flee. Christians, above all, should find ways to love, to cherish, and to correct the civic world.

"These Thy Gyftes and Creatures":
The Sacramentality of Literature

Travis Du Priest

"And Indeed What Are the Heavens, The Earth, Nay every creature, but Heiroglyphics and Emblems of his Glory?" —Francis Quarles

In his Great Prayer of Thanksgiving in the 1549 Book of Common Prayer for the Church of England, Archbishop Cranmer included the phrase, "these thy gyftes and creatures of bread and wine." Cranmer wanted, of course, to underscore in the communicants' minds two things—first, that the bread and wine of Holy Communion are gifts to us from God. And second, that the bread and wine are "creatures," that is, something created; or, in Elizabethan English, food and drink that serves mankind's material comfort. The creatureliness of Holy Communion provides the necessary entrance into the world of sacramentality.

This theology is clearly expressed in The 1552 Articles of Religion, as they make clear the meaning of sacraments in the *Book of Common Prayer*. In Section XXVI, "Of the Sacraments" we read:

> Sacraments ordained by the worde of God be not onely Badges and tokens of Christian Mennes profession, but rather thei bee certeine sure *witnesse,* and effectuall signes of grace. This is but an echo of the tradition.

This definition hasn't changed too much throughout the tradition. St. Augustine taught that sacramentality means sign or symbol, that is, a visible sign of something invisible or sacred. Later in the High Middle Ages, St. Bonaventure wrote that sacraments are "sensible signs divinely instituted as remedies through which, beneath the cloak of material species, God's power operates in a hidden manner" (Chapter 1, *Breviolquium*).

Fr. DuPriest explores the idea of the sacramental in literature.

Many of the features of sacraments can be applied as well to literature. In fact, there interestingly exists a special link between the sacramental and the written word. St. Ambrose had asked in Question 13, "On the Sacraments:" "Who, then, is *the author* of the sacraments but the Lord Jesus?" [italics mine] This metaphor of authorship has also been used in the tradition, and was a favorite in the Renaissance; Archbishop Cranmer wrote in the service of Matins, "O God, which art author of peace and lover of concorde. . . ."

Within the encompassing notions of sacramentality, we find these specific key notions which I believe have a carry-over into the world of literature: (1) physicality and the visibility of the invisible (thereby creating a passage between the inner and outer worlds of existence) (2) effectualness; and (3) tirelessness.

I will touch on how literature fulfills these three aspects of sacramentality, suggesting the related issues of (4) incompletion or hiddenness and (5) faith of the believer.

physicality and visibility

Both the sacraments and literature are physical. As the bread and wine of communion is to be eaten, so even the word of scripture (literature) is to be eaten and is described metaphorically as a physical creature by Cramner; the Prayer Book's collect for the Second Sunday in Advent reads

"Blessed lord, which hast caused all holy Scriptures to bee written for our learnying; graunte that we maye in suche wise hear them, read, marke, learne, and inwardly digeste them. . . ."

Later in the 16th century Sir Philip Sidney presses home the physicality of literature and the visibility of the invisible. In the *Defense of Poesy*, Sidney says,

> for what soever the Philosopher saith should be done, He [the poet] giveth a *perfect picture* of it. . .*So he coupleth the generall notion with the particulare example. A perfect picture* I saye: for he yieldeth the powers of the mynde an *Image* of yt, whereof the Philosopher bestoweth but a wordishe description; which doth neighter strike, pearce, nor possesse the right of the soule. (14 [italics mine])

This figuring forth is but confirmed by Sidney; it has been a part of the literary tradition for centuries, even of non-western literature. Listen to Wei T'ai, an 11th-century Chinese poet: "Poetry presents *the thing* in order to convey the feeling. It should be *precise about the thing* and reticent about the feeling, for as soon as the mind responds and connects with the thing the feeling shows in the words, this is how poetry enters deeply into us." Literature, like a sacrament, is a sensible sign. All literature is particular, that is, it is incarnational; it brings the general to the specific. Wordsworth said language is "the incarnation of thought." In a most perceptive article, "How Contemplatives Read the World," Kenneth Russell also points in our time to this incarnational quality of literature: "Only the poet, the intuitive knower blessed with the gift of making, can find the metaphoric and rhythmic means to give flesh to the invisible knowledge we have within us" (199).

effectualness/inner and outer passage

The effects of the sacraments are the bestowal of grace, forgiveness and spiritual empowerment. The effects of literature, as I understand them, are the result of interior reflection. Reading literature, like participating in the sacraments, is a way in which the exterior or physical world intersects with our internal life.

Earlier generations of writers were convinced that literature had positive moral effects. Sidney again: The philosopher is a teacher, but "no mann is so much. . .as to compare the Philosopher in *moveing* to the Poet. . . ." By its physicality and appeal to the senses, literature entertains, "delights the mind and the heart." Literature is a bridge. Having been delighted, we are open to learning; having learned, we then, mind-in-heart as the mystics would say, are moved to virtuous action, or at least to reflective thought.

In the next century, the seventeenth, this notion is set forth by George Herbert in "The church-porch," the preface poem of "The Temple":

> Hearken unto a Verser, who may chance
> Ryme thee to good, and make a bait of pleasure.
> A verse may finde him, who a sermon flies,
> And turn delight into sacrifice.

Here clearly expressed is this same inner-outer connection which resurfaces in the very first poem of "The Church," that is, "The Altar:" "A heart alone / Is such a stone / O let thy blessed sacrifice be mine / And sanctify this ALTAR to be thine." In this poem the altar is classical, Hebraic and Christian—an object within the house of worship, but mainly it is the narrator's, and by extension the reader's heart.

We do not have to stop in the Renaissance, however, to find such a theory of literature. Robert Frost, in an essay called "The Figure a Poem Makes," wrote this about a poem:

> It begins in delight and ends in wisdom. . . .It runs a course of lucky events, and ends in a clarification of life—not necessarily a great clarification, such as sects and cults are founded on, but in a momentary stay against confusion.

So, the edification may be more tentative in our century, but the effectualness of literature is still evidenced in the virtue of reflective thought.

Even writers who make no special claim to being Christian or even religious understand how literature works, understand, that is, literature's effectualness. In a clever essay entitled "What's Really Going On?" novelist Gail Godwin tells of a large woman in a red suit who asks the author for her autograph. The red-suited woman confesses that she herself doesn't have time to read fiction; after all, she's in charge of 62 branch banks in the real world, with no time to escape to never-never land.

Godwin muses about her, "What is it to me if you've never died and wept for your old self in the dark and been born some new, stronger thing as a result of having been thoroughly shaken by a novel?" (*Antaeus* 114) The metaphor of rebirth is, I think, an appropriate one to describe the effect of literature, of reading. Doctors are not the only surgeons who perform surgery in our society; surely many a writer has given many of us a new heart.

Need I say that this is the same inward journey of the sacraments; the communicants at Holy Communion are "made one bodye with thy soone Jesu Christe, that he may dwell in them and they in hym." The effectualness of literature is a transmogrifying of our inner world. As Metropolitan Anthony Bloom, the head of the Russian Orthodox Church outside of Russia, writes,

> If you watch your life carefully you will discover quite soon that we hardly ever live from within outwards; instead we respond to incitement. . . .How seldom can we live simply by means of the depth and richness we assume that there is within ourselves.

Literature is able to effect this grace of inner plumbing by allowing us to share in the consciousness of another. Just as the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist keep alive the mystical Body of Christ, so too do we readers, through entering the imaginative world of poetry and fiction, keep alive the interior, reflective expression of the writer. Likewise, the literature class may be the occasion for the "sharing in," the communal action, of the collective consciousness of literary art as the Eucharistic sacrament is essentially the action of breaking bread and sharing the cup.

But, as Canadian novelist Rudy Wiebe has stated, "Following a good writer is like cutting through the Bush." Most people in our society don't stick with real writers. They get off and get on a railroad track that leads exactly where they know they're going. This is evidenced in non-religious writing or it can be strictly-biased religious literature. Even a conference like Christianity and Literature may read itself as a conference on Christian literature, rather than on Christianity and literature. How sad for those who don't stick with the writers; they miss out on life's greatest questions and some of life's most interesting answers. They miss the grace of reflection and the chance for interior transformation.

timelessness

In speaking about Holy Scripture, Herbert O'Driscoll, a priest of the Church of Canada, has said, "*We* are the interior landscape on which scripture is played out." I would broaden that statement to read "literature." Literature is symbolic communication, and as such creates, as do the sacraments, the quality of *alwaysness*. Sacramentally, bread, wine, oil, candles, water, and the word of scripture connect me, you and me, to the past; but they do not take us to the past and leave us there. They take us there and bring us back. There's a bridge quality to symbols and sacraments that does not let us stay in either the present or the past very long: we're here, we're there, we're there, we're here. A wonderful example of the expression of *alwaysness* in literature is the charming play from the Middle Ages, the *Second Shepherd's Play*, in which Christ is born, and then played with by medieval shepherds in much the same way that Mary, Joseph, and Christ in medieval windows and paintings appear alternately as Dutch, French, Spanish, German, or Italian peasants.

This characteristic of the sacraments we know in literary criticism in the technical term, "the literary present tense;" Odysseus *is* returning home (present, now) because when we engage our intellect with that ancient story we are with Odysseus; we are there, and he is here, inside of our consciousness.

incompleteness

Yet, God's ways are hidden. Reminding us of our lack, of our own incompleteness, is the prop-

erty of both sacrament and literature. There was one sacrifice, once, for all, as Cranmer sums up the Reformation theology he was so influenced by. And likewise, Spencer critic Tom Roach cautions even against terms such as "Christ-figure," as there is but one Christ-figure. Furthermore, we celebrate the sacraments "until he comes again." We cannot overlook that one reason the sacraments have achieved such high regard in the Church is that Christ has ascended; He is not present with his people. If we can speak of the real presence we must also speak of the real absence. We celebrate "until he comes." And we read "until he comes." The sacraments bring us *a* presence, but not *the* presence. The sacraments remind us and make present to us a reality, but not *the* reality for which our souls yearn. The sacraments, then, are reminders of the incompletion of our lives.

Likewise, reading signifies an incompletion. We all know that poetry often depends on what is not said, on what is not there. I hardly need to give any example. I think of an e.e. cummings poem "loneliness a leaf falls." Or, on the theme of absence, here the necessary absence of the master in order that the student achieve advancement in the spirit, the Chinese poet Li Po:

> under a pine
> I asked his pupil
> who said, Master's
> gone gathering balm
>
> . . .somewhere
> about the mountain;
> The cloud's so thick
> I don't know where.

Both the theme and scheme of incompleteness in literature remind us that, as Martin Luther put it, we are becoming human; we are not yet fully human, fully intelligent, fully empathetic, fully compassionate, The journey motif, an archetypal there, makes this same point. I think particularly of journey literature and of journeyers such as Chaucer's pilgrims, Voltaire's Candide, of Sir Parcival, of Red Crosse Knight, or of Thornton Wilder's Theophilous North, Newt in Elizabeth Madox Robert's "On the Mountainside," —characters who are on their way but have not yet arrived. Characters who live, as we all do, in between a remembrance of Eden and some hope of glory. Just as the act of all reading is meditative and in some broad sense religious according to Eliade, so literature and the act of reading makes us all, in the words of Quaker writer Carol Murphy, "inward travellers."

receptionism

Finally, we must ask the Reformation's haunting question, does the faith of the believer affect the efficacy of the sacrament? Cranmer hedged; he upheld the objective efficacy of the sacraments, yet he spoke of "faithfully receiving" the same. The matter of "receptionism" figures also in our understanding of literature. Just as the believer must take a leap of faith, so must the reader be willing to "suspend disbelief" and enter faithfully into the writer's world. Is the bread and wine a sacrament while reserved? Is a book literature while on the shelf? Yes and no.

It would seem to me that we do have a responsibility to be "ready readers," "fit," to use Milton's word. We cannot inwardly digest unless we first read, mark, and learn; naturally, the more we read, mark, and learn, the better inward digesters we will become, with a greater number of planes for new thoughts and ideas to rest upon in our minds, as Octavio Paz puts it. There is, of course, always room for mystery—for Eliot's "hints and guesses," for loving the sound of "The Waste Land" without understanding it, as Virginia Woolf said was the case with her.

In the words to his famous Christmas carol, Phillips Brooks gives voice to this insight about the readiness of the reader: "How silently, how silently, the wondrous gift is given; so God imparts to human hearts the blessings of his heaven. No ear may hear his coming, but in this world of sin, where meek hearts will receive him still, the dear Christ enters in." Our "meek hearts" include the willingness to read, mark, and learn as much as we can, to recognize our need to journey on, to seek and not to pretend we're already there, already filled up.

No matter what one's personal view of the functioning of the sacraments might be, at the very least we must present ourselves in order to receive them. And there is a sense in which we need to believe in literature, not in a sacrilegious sense, but in the sense of knowing its power and potential. C.S. Lewis in "Is Theology Poetry?" says, "I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen—not only because I see it, but because I see everything by it." The sacraments cloak God's hidden power; literature is our means of "probing the mystery," as Ellen Gilchrist puts it in *Falling Through Space*. Bereft without it, we are all the richer for it.

Allan Jones, in speaking about the novels of Graham Greene, asserts that literature calls into question the atheism of the non-believer as well as challenges the piety of the believer. Those who allow themselves to receive the gracious benefits of literature—interior reflection that can deepen discernment and perspective—are blessed by finding occasionally "that they are also blessed by sometimes finding that momentary confusion against the stay."

Both those who find and those who still seek are blessed—either in the *via affirmatio* of the fulness of faith or the *via negativa* of the emptiness of faith. And both ways, or conditions, are inherent in the sacraments and in literature: the sacraments are for sinners, the poor in spirit; literature is for those struggling to become human—for those who may not sense "the something beyond" and for those who sense something beyond but who need to dirty their souls in experience.

Readers, though, who find *either* that "momentary stay" or that "momentary confusion" are, people better equipped to present themselves as "living sacrifices," that is, people equipped to sense more strongly the unity of life and perhaps even to find their own proper place and destiny in the world. ✟

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TO UNKNOWN: A LETTER

I lost you, brother or sister,
when I was too young to understand loss,
the shallow spot it rubs into the soul.

Miscarried
as if it were our mother's fault,
as if she dropped you,
as if her womb carried you improperly
and slipped.

You got no funeral, no memories, no flowers,
not even a name or a gender
for reference—
just a shadow-child missing from our dinner table,
the emptiness our mother held.

Escaped sibling,
you made way for our brother,
conceived just three months later.
It remains an acceptable sacrifice.
I thank you, and look toward our reunion
when I will have a name and face
to put to the nameless darkness
that scuds at intervals
across the surface of my heart.

Meet me at the twin gates
carved from a single pearl.
I have red hair and—Oh!
Never mind.
You will know me.
We will know everything.

Heath Davis Havlick

The Threshold of the Spiritual Life

William A. Evertsberg

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth." Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, "Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!" Nathaniel asked him, "Where did you get to know me?" Jesus answered, "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you." Nathanael replied, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" Jesus answered, "Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these." And he said to him, "Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

John 1:43-51

In *A River Runs Through It*, fly-fishing afficionado Norman MacLean reminds us that most of the disciples were fishernen, and that St. John, clearly, since he was "the disciple whom Jesus loved," must have been a dry-fly fisherman, the apex of fishermanhood. My personal favorite is Nathanael, who probably didn't know which end of the fly-rod to hold, but whom I consider to be the patron saint of intellectual believers. Let me suggest that Nathanael might be the patron saint of the Festival of Faith and Writing.

Of the four evangelists, St. John is the only one to mention a disciple named Nathanael, and the scholarly consensus seems to be that Nathanael is the name John gives to the disciple the other Gospels call Bartholomew. Bartholomew, or Bar Tolmai, after all, is really a surname, so the disciple in question may be Nathanael Bar Tolmai—Nathanael, Son of Tolmai.

Someone once said that Nathanael's faith begins with a sneer: "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" We first meet him when Philip, who in the Gospels is always dragging people to Jesus, breathlessly announces to his friend Nathanael "We have found him of whom Moses and the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth."

But Nathanael is an intellectual, and he sneers, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" A workingman from a hick town. "Come on, Philip, I wasn't born yesterday. Go try your new religion on some wide-eyed teenager or something."

Nathanael says things like that a lot. He's not easily convinced. I've gotta share this with you. Have you heard this story? So Dale Brown is teaching his freshman English class about double negatives. In English, says Professor Brown, two consecutive negatives form a positive, for example when you say "He ain't got no class," you're really saying that he's a classy guy. And Professor Brown was saying that this situation prevails in many languages around the world, that two negatives often make a positive. But then he told his students that the converse was never true. He was absolutely sure that there was no instance in any language in which a double positive becomes a negative. And a skeptical freshman in the back row says, "Yeah, right!"

This meditation was delivered as a homily during Vespers at the Festival of Faith and Writing sponsored by Calvin College in March of this year.

Nathanael says "Yeah, right!" a lot. Philip says, "We have found him of whom Moses and the prophets spoke." Nathanael says "Yeah, right!" "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Nathanael doesn't ask if Jesus is from God; Nathanael asks if Jesus is from the big city.

St. Augustine thought that Nathanael was cut from finer cloth than the other disciples. Augustine said that Nathanael was an intellectual, a man of books. When Jesus first meets Nathanael, he says, "I've seen you before. I've seen you sitting under the fig tree." Most first-century Galilean homes, you see, had a fig tree growing in the front yard. The shade of a fig tree was a common place for reading and study, perhaps the only private place in the cramped quarters of first-century homes.

So, I'm guessing that the first thing Jesus notices about Nathanael is that he is an intellectual, with all the condescending arrogance sometimes attendant upon that cerebral malady. He was, to use a phrase of John Updike, a "religious aristocrat."

Nathanael's religion begins with a sneer: "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" He thinks not. But this doesn't discourage Jesus for an instant. Nathanael comes striding down the road all bluff and boast to prove to himself that nothing good can come from Nazareth, and Jesus sees him coming down the road and when Nathanael is within earshot, he says, "Behold, an Israelite in whom there is no guile." Or, as the NRSV puts it, "Look, here's an Israelite in whom there is no deceit." Jesus says, "Behold, here's a guy who insists on the truth. Here's a guy who won't suffer fools gladly. Here's a guy with a watchful eye for religious fraud and evangelical swindlers."

Jesus says, "I saw you sitting under the fig tree." I saw you with your books, Nathanael, and you are a man in whom there is no guile. Though presumably Jesus would prefer that Nathanael lose the bluff and boast, he does bless Nathanael's approach. For Nathanael, the shade of the fig tree is the threshold of the spiritual life. If he's reading the right books under the fig tree, he has peopled his mind with trustworthy companions. He has filled out his mind to that third dimension without which our spirit is thin, flat, shallow, and defenseless against the inanities that always assail the thinking believer, from the silly fundamentalisms of the religious right which find a demon under every rock and an angel on every shoulder, to the soulless fundamentalisms of orthodox scientism which has tried to persuade us that Darwin and his ilk have hammered the last nail in religion's coffin.

So I like to think of a Festival of Faith and Writing as the threshold of the spiritual life, the shade of a fig tree where we can colonize our minds with trustworthy companions. I've been reading this wonderful book by Wayne Booth entitled *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction*, and that phrase is his: reading colonizes the mind. Reading is the company we keep. It gives one a community of friends who can lead one to a richer and fuller life than one can imagine on one's own.

So the question becomes: With whom have you colonized your mind at the threshold of the spiritual life? Is Atticus Finch in there, teaching you that a life in God is attended by immoderate cost and prodigious reward? "Miss Jean Louise, stand up, your Father's passin' by." Is Godric in there, kissing the leprous, faceless lump of flesh he can't tell is man or maid? "I closed my eyes against the foul and ashen thing that once was human flesh like mine and kissed its pain. And the tale they tell is of a leper cleansed." Is Oscar Hijuelos' Mr. Ives in there? Poor people broke his heart. The "fruits of his labors drop like pebbles into the sea of the city's growing troubles, but perhaps in the end he makes just a little bit of difference."

Is Annie Lamott in there, trying to outrun the hound of heaven, whom she describes in her contrary way as a cat on little feet, and finally giving up and saying, "Screw it. I quit. All right, Jesus, you can come in," and now she's a day away from slapping her Jesus-Fish bumper sticker on her car, after she checks to see whether the adhesive from the bumper sticker will leave her car tarnished and void out her lease agreement? Is Raney in there, confronting the cheerful banalities of fashionable religion with her homespun truths? Is Asher Lev in there, discovering that in his skillful hands lie both the power of the divine *and* the power of the demonic, the Master of the Universe, and the *sitra achra*, the Other Side? Are Maya Angelou's grandmothers in there? "In Virginia tobacco fields . . . . Along Arkansas roads, in the red hills of Georgia, into the palms of her chained hands, she cried out against calamity, 'You have tried to destroy me and though I perish daily, I shall not be

moved.' " Do you know why the caged bird sings?

So the shade of the fig tree, this colonizing of the mind with trustworthy companions, is the *threshold* of the spiritual life, but Nathanael's story doesn't end there, of course. Jesus says to Nathanael, "Greater things than these shall you see." The fig tree is just the threshold of the spiritual life. The phrase comes from Proust, who goes on to say that reading can introduce us to the spiritual life, but it does not constitute it. He says, "we would like the author to provide us with answers when all he is able to do is provide us with desires." In fact, he says, reading can become dangerous "when instead of awakening us to the personal life of the mind, reading tends to take its place, when the truth no longer appeals to us as an ideal which we can realize only by the intimate progress of our own thought, and the efforts of our own hearts."

I think it was Schopenhauer who said that "the reading of many books is the sign of a lazy mind." Oscar Wilde said "We live in an age which reads too much to be wise." Kierkegaard warned against the shallow religion of the aesthete, who ultimately values only what is interesting, not what is true, and not what is good, but only what is interesting. Emerson said that "thinking must not be subdued by its instruments. Books are for the scholar's idle times. When one can read God directly, the hour is too precious to be wasted in other men's transcripts." In other words, at some point past the threshold, through prayer, worship, and living in the world God made and for which Christ died, we have to leave the shade of the fig tree and take up the cross and follow. There comes a time when we must stop reading about Atticus Finch and Godric, and start defending the disenfranchised and embracing the foul leper. I mean in real life. There comes a time when we have to stop reading about Jean Valjean and go down into the sewers of Paris to cart the beaten, bloodied Mariuses of the world back into the light of day. The other day a homeless man came to my office. I told him to go away until I finished reading *Les Miserables*, the Wretched Ones. Just then a cock crowed.

So Jesus calls Nathanael away from the shade of the fig tree, away from the colony of trustworthy but imaginary companions, and into a life on the road, the life of discipleship, the life of the cross. All this, this festival, the life of the mind, the delightful hours we spend in superior intellectual company, is just preliminary to the spiritual life.

Nathanael's faith began with a sneer. But it ended with a confession: "Rabbi, you are the son of God. You are the King of Israel."

"Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Nathanael asked. I wonder if he got a fuller answer to his question as he tagged along through the Palestinian countryside with Jesus' little band of followers, probably on the outermost edge, looking on warily from the outside. I wonder what went through his keen and intellectual mind when Jesus welcomed the children into his lap, touched a leper, kept company with ladies of the evening, and spoke truth to power. I wonder what he thought that Friday afternoon so long ago as he watched from a safe distance while Jesus hung there from the thin sinews of his hands and feet, and the blood splashed onto the rocks of a hill called Golgotha, and the breath came hard and slow and shallow, and the life he gave for the smart and the stupid alike slipped away toward the God he refused to abandon. I wonder if Nathanael finally discovered if anything good came from Nazareth.

We never hear about Nathanael again in any significant way, but if it's true that his surname is Bartholomew, tradition tells us that he preached the Gospel to the ends of the earth. He went to Egypt, Persia, India, and Armenia, where he was killed for his faith. Nathanael the sophisticate, martyred for his faith! Not for his brains, but for his faith! Can anything good come out of Nazareth? Come and see. "For I tell you, greater things than these will you see."

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WHAT THE FRIENDS SAID

Lise was talking about chaos theory
when Michael said he knew the secret
of the universe: continual retribution.
We laughed because he meant his rotten
kids are his karmic desserts. We laughed
and I thought of our friend who was
pleased to discover as he was dying
he didn't feel singled out.

To go this way with him it's hard
not to think of the bird an old woman
told me about, the soul fluttering until it shakes
itself loose and hard not to feel
the skies spin around this midday
with me in mind, the sun focused
on my head like a child's magnifying glass.

The lawn is dying, too, and this pleases me.
I'm spiteful with those I love and this pleases me.

I shut out the echoing conversation, looking
out the window before bed. The swamp
is drying up already. Hard, lean frogs
made the road home treacherous,
slick with their fugitive bodies.

Mark Conway

Lessons of War
a review essay

Fredrick Barton

> *. . . And tomorrow morning,*
> *We shall have what to do after firing. But today,*
> *Today we have naming of parts.*
> —Henry Reed, from *Lessons of the War*

Bill Clinton's cowardice about owning up to his efforts to avoid military service in Vietnam has clouded the national memory of America's disastrous involvement in Southeast Asia and has sullied an appreciation of those tens of thousands who hastened the war's end by endeavoring so mightily to avoid participating in it. The current presidential campaign will do nothing to clarify our collective recall. Capitalizing on the connections of his political father, George W. Bush escaped Vietnam with a posting in the Texas National Guard. That consummate political animal Al Gore, meanwhile, trying to bolster the sagging electoral fortunes of his dovish father in a hotly contested Tennessee re-election campaign, volunteered for duty in Vietnam. I'd perhaps applaud his filial devotion more if he hadn't drawn a plush assignment far from the field and a tour of duty less than half that of men whose fathers weren't U.S. Senators. As I view it, Bush and Gore have each other pretty much stalemated on the military service business, and they'll likely do nothing to redress the ignominious legacy Clinton has left us on the issue.

Thousands of men my age devoted years of our young lives to fighting against the war in Vietnam by scrambling to frustrate its military draft procedures. And most of us remember our rebellious activities during those years not with Clinton's calculating shame but with a fierce pride. Richard Nixon's infamous Christmas bombing didn't stop the war in Vietnam. We did. A scene in my novel *The El Cholo Feeling Passes* was modeled quite closely on one in my own experience. Set in January of 1970, two college seniors are talking about the Vietnam draft which both men will face upon graduation in a few months. Football player Paul "Nose" Taylor recently suffered a serious knee injury and figures he will be draft exempt. His basketball player friend, Rich "Tricks" Janus, the narrator, wonders what his own fate will be. As the scene progresses, Paul says of his injury,

> "Bet this old knee's worth 'bout a million bucks now. Now that the big hurtin's over, I suspect I could find quite a few guys willin' to trade for her." He laughed, slung his leg off the table and bent to yank down his pants leg. When he sat back up, he brushed at his short brown hair which had fallen across his freckled face.
>
> "I'd trade you," I said. I crushed my empty beer can against my knee and then aimed it toward the metal trash bin in the corner. The beer can rattled in the receptacle like a bell with a broken clapper.
>
> "Sure you would," Paul said. He got up from his chair and went to the refrigerator, returning with two unopened cans of Schlitz. He clicked mine down on the table in front of me and tore the tab off his. "Sure you would, Tricks." Paul sucked at the foam oozing from his can.
>
> "I sure as *hell* would," I said, my voice heated. Somehow I thought he was making fun of me, that he was insensitive to the fact that I was already scared witless and was getting more desperate with every passing day.
>
> "Man," Paul grinned at me, "what kinda point guard you gonna make with only one wheel. Your defense ain't so much as it is."
>
> "You redneck hillbilly," I said. "You know about as much about my defense as Westmoreland knows about defensing the Cong."
>
> "*You* calling *me* a redneck is about like Rose callin' Scarlet, Crimson. You may think you've Yankeed up that accent of yours, Tricks, but we all know that underneath you're just as Southern as grits."

"Bite me," I said, laughing.

"Buddy, I'd do most anything in the world to help you beat this draft thing. But if you want out on some kind of pervo, you better find yourself some other cracker."

"Bite me twice," I said.

Paul looked at me and shook his head. "Tricks, man, you gotta getta hold of yourself. You gotta keep things in perspective."

"Yeah, I just don't want my perspective to be blurred by a goddam translucent body bag."

"That's morbid, man," Paul said.

"That's real, man."

Paul did not respond. We finished our beers, and he got us another round. We drank them in silence, Paul occasionally shaking his head, me staring at the light bulb, trying to decide whether it was actually moving, ever so slightly, back and forth.

Finally, when Paul brought us still two more beers, he said, "I could fix it, you know. I mean, if I got drunk enough, I think I could."

"Fix what?" I asked.

"We could prop your leg up on the table, and I could just fall on it. That's sort of what happened to me." He stood up. "My cleats were stuck in the grass, like this see." He planted his foot and grabbed his leg to demonstrate its inflexibility. "I was straightened up by this big guy from behind. He had me by the shoulders and was driving me forward. Then my cleats stuck. And when the safety came in low from the front, he just buckled my knee backwards. At first I didn't even feel it."

In his description of his injury, which I had heard many times before, Paul seemed to have forgotten his proposition. He looked at me intently. "It'd hurt ya like hell, Tricks. But I'd do it."

"That's crazy, man," I said.

"Yeah," he said. "I know." He got us more beers, and we drank on.

Somewhere into my second six-pack, I said, "Would you really do it, Nose?"

"I'd hate it," he said. "I'd hate it."

"But you'd do it?"

"I'd do it. I'd have to love you awfully much. But I'd do it."

I drank off about half a beer at a draught. "Then let's do it."

"Now?" Somehow his tone was only half-questioning. It was as if he wasn't asking a question at all, but only resigning himself to some pre-ordained fate.

"One more beer," I said. Paul brought fresh ones, and we averted our eyes from one another. When the beers were done, I propped my leg up on the table and rolled up my pants.

"Now," I said quietly.

Paul rose. He came and stood behind my chair and rested his hands on my shoulders.

"I'm ready," I said.

"OK," he said. He moved around alongside my leg so that he could bring his full weight down on me. One hand on my thigh, the other on my shin, he tested the leg's give. "Tricks," he said, "I can't do it."

"No?"

"No," he said, "I'm sorry."

"Thank God," I said.

When I read this passage on a college campus recently, a student asked afterwards why the men of my generation were so unwilling to risk themselves in battle the way men of earlier generations had. I would be hypocritical to claim that fear of dying in Vietnam or suffering some life-changing, physically debilitating injury didn't color my determination to resist being drafted. But after I admitted that fact, I described the scene in Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* where the American patrol boat crew comes upon a Vietnamese family aboard a sampan. The peasant native people hardly look menacing, small and obviously frightened. But Vietnam, the G.I.'s well knew, was a place where the hand that lobbed a grenade under a jeep many times belonged to a child, where the shooter in an ambush was many times a woman, where the elusive enemy seemed anyone with high Asian cheekbones. When a terrified woman aboard the sampan makes a sudden move as the Americans try to ascertain that the Vietnamese aren't transporting weapons, a jumpy soldier opens fire, and pretty soon a boatload of innocents are dead. The Vietnamese woman, it turns out, was trying to protect a basket of puppies. The key element in this scene is that the soldiers who kill the boat people act not out of viciousness, but out of fear. Unlike Tom Berenger's Sergeant

Barnes character in *Platoon*, they aren't dead-eyed murderers. The *Apocalypse Now* characters are average American boys, far from home and in deadly peril from a foe they can't readily identify. In the pressure of a moment, they react wrongly, and the result is an act of violence they will have to carry with them for the rest of their lives.

As I fought the Vietnam draft, I knew beyond all question that the war in Southeast Asia was a colossal foreign policy blunder. The Vietnamese had been fighting for independence for a thousand years. The Americans were only the last in a long series of enemies. I knew that men my age were dying for a cause that wasn't theirs, wasn't correctly ours as a nation. And yes I feared for my safety. But just as much, I feared that I might go to Vietnam and react as did the river patrol soldiers in *Apocalypse Now*. That film didn't appear until 1979, seven years after my own struggle against the draft ended. But it captured the reality of so many, on both sides, who fought and died there. They were, so often, innocents opposed. Too many died and too many survived with the burden of having taken blameless life, the survivor, in so many cases, emotionally crippled forever after. In sum, I didn't want to have to live afterwards with what I knew I might well do if I surrendered to the draft and bore arms against people who were not my enemies—that is, do what any man might under the circumstances. I will always believe that my brave late friend Ron Ridenhour, the soldier whose letter to Congress broke the Mai Lai massacre story, was hounded into an early grave at age 51 by a conscience that never entirely let him forgive himself. One humid, beery New Orleans night twenty years from the jungles of the Mekong Delta, he summarized the many incredible risks he took in his subsequent life as an investigative reporter: "I served in Vietnam," he said, "where I fired upon people I later found to be unarmed. And now I have so little time left to save my soul."

rules for unruly events

The death of innocent people is an inevitable by-product of war. And starting with a battle scene in Vietnam and moving forward to a fictional incident in Yemen, William Friedkin's *Rules of Engagement* takes that fact on directly. How are soldiers to behave when under fire? What are a fighting man's obligations to the safety of others as measured against his own safety and that of the men with whom he serves? Mistakes will be made; that is for sure. And when mistakes are made in battle, people die. But how do we judge mistakes? What precautions for the safety of non-combatants might we reasonably require of the men who shoulder weapons under orders from our national command?

Written by Stephen Gaghan, *Rules of Engagement* is the story of Colonel Terry Childers (Samuel L. Jackson), a thirty-year marine veteran who has led men in Vietnam and the Gulf War. Now he is sent to Yemen to rescue U.S. Ambassador Mourain (Ben Kingsley), his wife (Anne Archer) and the embassy staff who are under fire from a violent demonstration that has escalated from invective to rock throwing to Molotov cocktails and ultimately sniper fire. Mourain fears that the angry mob at the embassy gate will storm the compound at any moment and concludes only an airborne marine intervention can prevent American civilian casualties. When Childers and his men arrive, they succeed in evacuating the ambassador and his family, including his seven-year-old son (Hayden Tank), but before they can begin to spirit the other civilians to sanctuary, the marines begin to take casualties, three men lost and others wounded. In response, Childers orders his troops to open fire on the crowd. They do, and within seconds the situation is brought under control. But the bloody cost of that control is high indeed. In the dusty cobblestone square before the embassy gate, more than eighty Yemenis lie dead, many of them women and children. Scores of others are critically wounded, many with shattered limbs that must be sacrificed to amputation.

The aftermath of Childers' order is a predictable foreign policy nightmare. Demonstrations against other U.S. embassies erupt throughout the Muslim world. And in part simply to defuse a severe international crisis, the military high command decides that Childers must be court-martialed and stand trial for eighty-plus counts of murder. Childers chooses as his defense attorney Colonel Hayes Hodges (Tommy Lee Jones), a fellow marine with whom he served in Vietnam. The brass selects Major Mark Briggs (Guy Pearce) to prosecute the case. And the rest of the film trans-

forms itself from harrowing military action to complicated courtroom drama.

Rules of Engagement gets off to a terrific start. In the Vietnam sequence which serves as the film's prologue, Childers and Hodges are caught in an ambush with all Hodges' men pinned down, most wounded and dying. Childers, however, manages to capture the enemy commander and his radio man. Desperate to save Hodges, Childers threatens to execute his captives on the spot if the commander does not order his troops to withdraw. Does such a threat fall within the rules of engagement? If Childers actually has to kill a captive in order to save his men, has he then crossed the line? No question arises about a soldier's "right" to kill an enemy combatant in battle. And obviously no question arises about the obligation of any soldier to protect the lives of his comrades in arms. How does one's duty change when the enemy throws down his weapon and raises his hands in surrender? How, in particular, does one define his duty to his fellows versus that to a captive when, as here, the captive possesses the power to halt an attack that will save the lives of one's comrades? In sum, genuinely principled theories aren't so easy to apply when lives are at stake in the heat of battle. Moral obligations fall into conflict. Judgments must be made in an instant. And often the rights of one must be measured against the needs of many.

Gaghan's script executes a brilliant reversal on our instinctive understanding of that principle when his film's action moves from the marsh of Vietnam to the marble hallways of Washington, D.C. There National Security Council Chief William Sokal (Bruce Greenwood) summarizes the government's dilemma over Childers' actions in Yemen. From a military standpoint Childers' actions were successful. The ambassador and his staff were saved, marine casualties were stopped by Childers' orders to fire, and the situation was brought under control. Viewed from a broader and more enduring perspective, however, Childers' actions can be judged a disaster. And because of them, more American lives, military and civilian alike, are placed in grave danger. How many additional embassies will have to be evacuated under attack? How many Marines will go down in such rescue missions? When will an embassy be overrun before the Marines can arrive? Viewed from this perspective, oughtn't the government, whatever its finding of fact, sacrifice Childers as an act of calculated diplomacy? And in deciding to sacrifice Childers, to convict him of murder and to imprison him for life or even to execute him, aren't the military high command and such civilian supervisors as Sokal acting only as a field commander would act when he sends one soldier on a suicide diversion in order to save the lives of his fellows and the object of their mission? We accept such a field decision as illustrated by Lee Marvin's threatening to shoot Mark Hamill if he doesn't advance against enemy fire in *The Big Red One*. Ought we not accept the comparable attitude about the one versus the many which has pasted the target of sacrifice over the heart of Terry Childers?

This is the terrifically potent material of enduringly important moviemaking. *Rules of Engagement*, unfortunately, squanders its core ingredients in a mad rush to deliver conventional entertainment. I could complain about ultimately trivial things like a meaningless subplot about Hodges' relationship with his disapproving Marine general father (Philip Baker Hall), included, presumably, to beef up the Hodges role enough that a star of Tommy Lee Jones' stature might take it. And I could complain about Hodges' largely pointless investigative trip to Yemen which yields added running time without changing the film's direction or conclusion. And I could certainly complain about the ridiculous fistfight Hodges and Childers get in, a set piece of Hollywood macho with much smashing of fists into faces leaving only the faintest bruises in the days thereafter.

Moreover, I do complain about narrative puzzles the film fails to solve. We see snipers shooting at Childers' Marines. No one could possibly object if Childers ordered his men to return fire. Why doesn't he? Before shooting directly into the crowd, Childers might have ordered his men to aim over heads of the demonstrators in an effort to disperse them. Why doesn't he? And after this option is raised once, why is it never broached again, never put to Childers directly? More seriously, I regret the way the film so quickly becomes about what Childers saw and not what he did. And in that regard, it becomes a lame tale of deception. Childers says that people in the crowd, women and children among them, were firing at his men. That's why he ordered his troops to shoot into the crowd. However, no other American at the scene sees what Childers sees (and we don't see it when

the action is dramatized for us). Hodges, therefore, can't produce a corroborating witness at trial. But a surveillance camera at the embassy is trained on the square where the crowd gathers to demonstrate, and we know from the very early going that a tape from that camera is delivered to N.S.C. Chief Sokal. Right about the film's mid-point, Sokal reviews that tape, sees that Childers has been telling the truth and promptly destroys the exculpatory evidence. Thus the film stupidly transforms itself from a fascinating examination of thorny issues about war-time morality into a pedestrian tale about victimization and villainy.

And the film doesn't even work on that level. Sokal's announced determination is to protect the interests of the United States even if that means unjustifiably punishing Childers to curry favor in a hostile Muslim world. But wouldn't making the tape public be a superior approach, a way of defending American actions rather than trying to apologize for them? After viewing the tape, what are Sokal's motives for persecuting an innocent man? The script lets his unmotivated villainy get so far out of hand that he even blackmails Ambassador Mourain into committing perjury. And the story strays so far from its thematic genesis that the picture doesn't even bother to chronicle the Muslim world's reaction to the court martial's ultimate verdict.

What finally bothered me the most about *Rules of Engagement*, however, was the film's surrender to an unbecoming cultural and national jingoism. Standing in for all Muslims, the Yemenis (chosen because this poor nation of fourteen million souls is among the least powerful of the "troublesome" Arab countries?) are depicted as howling madmen one and all involved in a vast conspiracy to embarrass and murder Americans. Meanwhile, before the slaughter of the people in the square, we are asked to see Childers as a particular hero because he risks his life (and the life of one of his soldiers) to lower the American flag so the ambassador can carry it out of the country with him. I consider myself as patriotic as the next man, but I can only consider Childers' actions in this regard foolhardy, irresponsible, and finally contemptible. The flag may be a symbol of our country, and our country may be worth dying for, but a mere symbol, several square yards of colored cloth, is absolutely not worth anybody's dying for.

By the same token, this picture labors mightily to define an American embassy compound, in Yemen or wherever, as "sovereign American soil" to be defended with the same ferociousness with which we would defend Massachusetts. I don't doubt this is the attitude of our government and military. And, of course, I understand a desire to provide security for embassy employees. Still, as a nation we need to be concerned with our standing among the mostly less-privileged people with whom we share the planet. And one polite step might be always to think of ourselves as guests when taking up residence, for whatever purpose, in somebody else's country.

Rules of Engagement is a film which ends as badly as it starts well. Childers' old Vietnam adversary, summoned to America to testify as a prosecution witness, tarries afterwards outside the courthouse to bond in martial understanding with an exchanged salute that made me profoundly sad for everybody involved in this project. In reducing its story to a mindless formula about military heroism degraded by civilian treachery, this picture abandons any potential sophistication about navigating the maze of cultural suspicion and any admirable ambiguity about judging the actions of men in combat.

unruly film about the rules

Another recent film offers far superior reflections on the combat experience of American soldiers in the Middle East. In strategy, it's rather the opposite of *Rules of Engagement*, which pretends to be morally probing but ultimately isn't. In counterpoint, writer/director David O. Russell's *Three Kings* pretends to be a traditional action picture with lots of people getting shot and lots of things blowing up, all the while the filmmaker is slipping in a series of provocative observations about American foreign and military policy. Audiences may squirm as a brave man is tortured and thrill to a flaming Humvee being bounced end over end like an empty cracker box tumbled along by a gale-force wind, but whereas this picture may work as a traditional military adventure story, it completely transcends its commercial trappings to become a true work of art.

Set in March, 1991, at the end of the Gulf War, *Three Kings* is the story of a group of American soldiers who try to take something home from the Arabian desert for themselves, namely a cache of gold that the Iraqis have looted from Kuwait (along with fleets of luxury cars, warehouses of jewels, and enough electronic gear to establish an international rivalry with Radio Shack). Archie Gates (George Clooney) is a disaffected special forces captain on the home stretch to retirement. He's currently assigned as military liaison to Adriana Cruz (Nora Dunn), a hard-driving but utterly neurotic television journalist covering the war. Archie has contempt for Cruz's relentless pushiness and otherwise has enough attitude for an entire class of teenagers in after-school detention. Troy Barlow (Mark Wahlberg) is a reserve sergeant with a newborn he's never seen waiting at home. He tries to do the right thing, but emblematic of us all, he's not above defining the right thing as what's good for himself and his family. Chief Elgin (Ice Cube) is a deeply religious African-American staff sergeant who thinks that God himself may have put an unprecedented opportunity in his path. Private Conrad Vig (Spike Jonze) is an ill-educated rural Southerner so dim that he doesn't apprehend the offensiveness of his casual racism.

The adventure begins shortly after the cease fire when our heroes find a map identifying the location of the gold cache not far from their own desert post. Capitalizing on the inevitable chaos of a celebrating army in stand-down mode, Gates and his small squad decide they can rip off the treasure in a single morning. So they gather the needed equipment, arrange to send Cruz on a wild goose chase and set off across a heavily mined desert landscape directly into the Twilight Zone. They think their little raid will change their lives forever, and they're right, but not for the reasons they think.

Fundamentally serious as this picture is at its core, *Three Kings* is nonetheless wildly entertaining in a variety of ways. The picture is expertly photographed by Newton Thomas Sigel. Pyrotechnics have gotten old hat in action movies, but the frequently violent visuals here are memorable, particularly a sequence in which an armored van careens off a road toward a land mine that summons the driver toward a fiery doom like a Hydra-headed angel of death. Employing the camera techniques Kevin Reynolds used in *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves* and Oliver Stone employed in *Natural Born Killers*, Sigel utilizes extreme slow motion to trace bullet trajectories and then Russell cuts to body diagrams to illustrate the catastrophic mayhem a piece of ballistic metal causes as it tumbles through human flesh, a fascinatingly sober departure from the action-movie norm which routinely celebrates rather than excoriates the firing of weapons.

The movie is also repeatedly laugh-out-loud funny. Gates has a droll comment for most every situation he encounters. Vig, meanwhile, is hilariously ignorant. But in an act of truly brilliant writing, he's not only never reduced to a crude joke, he's allowed to evolve into a character with the capacity to learn, one who ultimately commands our sympathy. Much of the film's humor, often dark, arrives like that flying cow in *Twister*. At one point to further their increasingly complicated escape, the Americans commandeer a fleet of civilian Kuwaiti automobiles and flee through the smoking dust of the desert in a caravan with Mercedes following Lexus following Rolls Royce. It's an image at once outrageous and symbolic, wanton luxury in the service of desperate need. At another point, when a huge tanker truck arrives in a dusty village during a standoff between opposing soldiers, the Iraqis immediately open fire on it, and the Americans dive for cover in expectation of a massive explosion. Rather than flames, however, the tanker spews white liquid. It's a milk truck, and the Iraqis have shot it as part of their strategy to starve the rebellious villagers.

In the closing days of the Gulf War, as the American army and its allies with their vast arsenal of astonishingly sophisticated weapons put a mesmerizingly easy whipping on Saddam Hussein's ill-equipped and poorly organized troops, President George Bush called for the Iraqi people to rise up against the ruthless dictator who had brought their nation to such ruin. Thinking that the Americans would surely support them, many did, particularly in the south along the borders of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. But geopolitical concerns and a conviction that the American public would not tolerate a high American casualty rate led Bush to accept Iraq's surrender without driving Saddam from power. Once the cease fire was negotiated, save for defensive action only, American troops

were under strict non-engagement orders. And that meant Saddam was able to turn his army's weapons on his own people. Some analysts have concluded that our policy even served to strengthen Saddam's hand by causing his internal enemies to show their heretofore carefully hidden faces, whereby they were identified and systematically eliminated.

This is the vicious world into which Gates and his men stumble. It's a surreal world where Saddam's soldiers lower their weapons repeatedly. The Iraqis are even willing to let Gates and crew make off with their gold. The only thing which the Americans must not do is try to interfere with Saddam's orders to slaughter any and all of his own people who have opposed him. And that's when a mercenary mission transforms itself into a mission of mercy, when a cadre of cynical soldiers find something outside themselves worth fighting for.

Reports of Saddam's brutality to those we encouraged to oppose him were included in news broadcasts at the time, but the impact of that grave human suffering was largely lost in American euphoria over the low-cost swiftness of our sweeping triumph. This revisionist film dares to ask if we didn't blindly snatch defeat from the trophy of victory. For not only is Saddam more entrenched than ever, our good standing in the third world, particularly in Muslim countries, has continued to fall. In direct contrast to the way we regard ourselves, the poor peoples of the world see us not as heroes but as bullies, not as champions of right but as protectors of self-interest. President Bush himself, foot firmly in mouth, described our motives for fighting the Gulf War as coming down to oil. Here, no doubt in response, when Barlow is captured, Saddam's minions torture him by pouring oil in his mouth. I was as dazzled as any American by the ease and technological marvel of our victory in the Gulf War, but I remain among the minority that continues to wonder if the war didn't represent another grotesque miscalculation, in its own way as ponderously ill-conceived as our disastrous involvement in Vietnam. Perhaps we might have done ourselves some good in the world had we helped bring democracy to Iraq. But by first exhibiting ourselves a nation of such incredibly naked power, able to rain death from above and far away with so incredibly slight a risk to our own men, and then by abruptly turning our back on those who would fight for freedom, we solidified our reputation abroad for caring a lot less about our avowed principles than about the prospective vulnerability of our economy.

In director Russell's view, America's "failure" in Iraq stemmed not from any irremediable national flaw but rather from a peculiar cultural myopia. We fought a war against a monster, he submits, without ever developing a clear picture of, much less generating a true sympathy for, his most manifest victims, who were not the rich Kuwaitis but the impoverished citizens of Saddam's own country. A product of a thoroughly integrated and oddly politically correct American military, Barlow tries to teach Vig that his epithets for Iraqis should not include references to skin color, and Elgin nods approvingly as Barlow lists examples of cultural but non-racial pejoratives Vig should employ instead. It's a darkly funny and telling moment. Russell is forever taking us places we don't expect. In several scenes, he introduces us to an elite Iraqi Republican Guard officer he reveals as a torturer and soon makes us despise. Eventually, though, we learn that the torturer was trained in his black arts by the CIA during the Iran-Iraq War. And later we discover that the man's hatred of the U.S. is neither ideological nor religious but entirely personal. His beloved infant son, presumably safe in a Baghdad suburb, was killed by an American bomb.

In these and other ways, Russell demands that we hear legitimate complaints against our actions, that we acknowledge the palpable reasons why people might hate us. For only by understanding the grievances of our enemies can we ever hope to find the common ground on which friendships may someday be forged.

new rules

The War in Vietnam was the central event in my life from the day I became draft eligible in 1966 until the day in 1972 my selective service board finally excused me in the aftermath of a severe basketball injury, a left ankle badly fractured and ripped of all its ligaments. The war transformed my college experience, focused my attention on the daily newspaper and the nightly newscast when my

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education would have been far better served with my attention focused on important books read too hastily, contemplated too briefly. The war robbed me too soon of the rapture available in unfocused intellectual curiosity and made me cynical when I would rather have been optimistic. It made me grow up too soon. It led me to make choices that would have been better left unmade.

But I concede that Vietnam shaped the man I have become, poured the foundations of the ways in which I continue to view the world and America's role in it. I thought hard enough about outright pacifism to have applied for draft exempt status as a conscientious objector, but I didn't escape selective service by that route, and I didn't deserve to. My father volunteered for military duty in World War II as did his friend and my hero, Baptist radical Will D. Campell. Had I been their age, I would have enlisted by their sides. All wars are bad, but some few, some very few, must be fought. So I'm not a pacifist. I am an advocate, however, of only the most cautious and limited use of American military force. Vietnam proved that for all our rockets, planes, bombs and bullets, firepower enough simply doesn't exist to cow a nation determined to resist. And I carry the lesson of Vietnam into my analysis of conflict whenever and wherever it arises.

In his politically charged stand-up act of the day, comedian Dick Gregory used to cite the figure the Pentagon spent for every enemy soldier it killed (I've forgotten the actual sum: $100,000? a million? Whatever, his point is made) and punctuate his research with the observation, "Hell, we could *buy* them for a lot less than that." And buy them is precisely what we should have done. Ho Chi Minh begged to be bought in the 1950s. Like Third-World leaders across the globe, Ho looked at America as the international hero of World War II. Had we poured the same amount of money into Vietnam industry that we wasted on bombs and bullets, we would have enhanced our national reputation for heroic altruism rather than painted ourselves in so many foreign minds as ruthless, reckless, and obsessed with power. Blinded by ideological tunnel vision, we destroyed when we should have built; we shed blood when we should and could have shed light.

Vietnam, I believe, was and remains the defining experience for most men of my generation, no matter what route they took, whether that of resistance or that of compliance. People older and younger may not remember a remarkable phenomenon of the Vietnam era which continues even today when I count among my close friends both military veterans and conscientious objectors. Those who took up arms, and those who took to the streets, were not nearly so divided as the nation which drove them to choose between one or the other. Because of the odd bond of that era, men as vastly different as John McCain and Bill Clinton can largely see eye to eye on the use of our nation's military power. And that makes me hopeful we will put fewer of our sons in the terrifying position of having to judge when to kill and thereafter in the impossible position of learning to live with having taken life.

Letters from Dogwood

"I wouldn't give tuppence for all of the rest!"

Charles Vandersee

Dear Editor:

Your question for the year presents a case of some delicacy. Indeed, "Why be a Lutheran in the new millennium?" I began thinking like Sherlock Holmes: Who are the people not qualified to answer this? These excluded, the remainder, however improbable, must be your authority.

Exclude, of course, pastors and theologians, having a vested and distorting interest. Exclude laypeople with long or intense Lutheran adhesion—people whose nostalgia or livelihood depends on the denomination prospering: scions of old families, church staff, professionals in affiliated hospitals and insurance agencies. Exclude temperaments whose treasured formulations ("Law and Gospel," "Two Kingdoms," "Sola Scriptura") override discernment—not unlike Inspector Lestrade of Scotland Yard, whose routine thinking kept obscuring reality.

Exclude non-Lutherans, even dispassionate historians and scholars. They're not privy to the inside, not in sync with the ethos. Risking the charge of reverse ageism, exclude people under fifty, too young to have thought strenuously about why they've not changed their minds on certain matters.

This appears to leave only me: a lifelong Lutheran of a certain age but never a student of theology or church history, from a family with no Lutheran clout or cachet. Here I stand. True, Dad attended a Lutheran parochial school for early indoctrination, as did his mother, my grandmother. As did I—eight years in that same school, though expanded to three rooms. That's ethos—*Luther's Small Catechism* and daily proof texts to memorize. Yet the ethos also became interrogated; my namesake grandfather (dead before I was born) reportedly stayed home Sundays resting and reading, thus representing critical discernment.

Mother, meanwhile, grew up in rural Indiana and belonged, with parents and sibs, to big St. James Lutheran in Lafayette. But when they couldn't get to town they made do with the Methodists in little Shadeland. Mother, a flower-lover, during her Methodist exposure picked up a song called "In the Garden" ("while the dew is still on the roses"), not a Lutheran chorale. Sometimes while sewing she intoned it softly, not sentimentally: discernment. Sometimes, but never on Sunday, she tuned her radio to Chicago's fundamentalist WMBI (Moody Bible Institute): ethos plus interrogation.

To complete the picture, we were all aware that the biggest church in town, with its cross-tipped steeple, was St. Mary's on Joliet Street. The smallest, a frame building the size of a two-car garage, was the Church of the Nazarene.

But back to Sherlock Holmes. What kinds of religious behavior does a discerning Lutheran find unsettling, ethos-rupturing? Whatever remains, however improbable, is the real Lutheran thing.

Lutherans at confession will say, with a bit of Old Adamic pride, that they are a limited people. They typically do not relish magic, omissive care, grape juice, golden plates out of New York soil, and loud carrying on. They are therefore unpersuaded by such persuasions as Roman Catholic, Christian Science, Baptist, Mormon, and Pentecostal. Lutheran mouths want real wine at Communion, inexpensive; their bodies want a good emergency room; their minds proceed cautiously in matters non-rational (prayers

Alumnus Charles Vandersee reports not only seeing St. Peter's in Rome during spring break but also the ruins of Pompeii, and orange trees full of oranges in Sorrento. His sense of comic irony remains, however, untouched by travel.

are OK, if well-crafted and unspontaneous). A Lutheran might experiment with family devotions, but the concept of spiritual discipline is far out, distant and suspicious.

All this is not disrespectful, merely grassroots candor, resisting platitudes and polite evasions. The question, after all, is not exactly what it seems: Not just why be a Lutheran, but why might the average Christian be a Lutheran *rather than something else*? It seems to come down to Taste, Temperament, and Conditioning (maybe all of them God-given?), rather than the respectable trinity of Theology, History, and Reasoning.

In human conditioning, we lose the passion for language that we once relished, from the nursery rhymes and gutter talk of childhood. Average people, myself among them, don't seek the proper technical or specialized terms. Homemade substitutes suffice. What, for example, is the klutzy coinage "omissive care" trying to say? Only that average people love solicitous medical attention, and there is one denomination, Christian Science, that seems excessively inappreciative of such a resource. In the headlines now and then appear parents who refuse medical aid for suffering children. Why be a Lutheran? For starters, to support the worldwide medical establishment.

What is the loose word *magic* trying to express? A Roman Catholic might not use that expression when referring to indulgences, repetitive prayers (rosary, novena), statues discovered weeping, and the priest in the mass "making God" out of bread and wine. The word *magic* might come to the Protestant mind when—somewhat shaky on Theology, History, and Reasoning—it notices these Catholic phenomena. It lacks the terminology that this denomination would use.

Probably a Roman Catholic would not speak of belonging to a *denomination* or *persuasion*, but to the Church. Which strikes a Protestant as affectation, since any religious group, whether gathered under a cross or in a garage, is surely a *denomination* (except the small new ones, which are *sects*). Why be a Lutheran? To stay grounded (i.e., heaven-oriented) with basics. A minimum of specialized language, no spiritual discipline, rather little complex ritualization, no novel inexplicabilities.

As for grape juice instead of biblical wine, be a Lutheran so as not to flout plain Scripture. When Scripture is unplain (baptize infants? immerse or sprinkle?), stay indoors and dry. As for Mormon golden plates, it's a bit much—straining credulity—to accept a new divine revelation after 1800 years of divine silence. Lutherans don't add to the already heavy load of classical Christian incredulity.

"It is difficult to imagine anyone," says once-Lutheran John Updike, "shouldering the implausible complications of Christian doctrine—the Christian story, however pared-down since the days when Italians were painting it into walls of wet plaster—without some inheritance of positive prior involvement" (*New Yorker*, Nov. 29, 1999). The novelist is unplainly saying: Unless you were conditioned to it from birth, the ancient Christian thicket of official teachings is too dense for today's unimpelled adult to struggle through.

As for loud carrying on, a Lutheran is spared revivals. In Sunday worship, spared noise. Certain resonant noises, made by tall skilled pipes, Lutherans call music, but the noise of human beings making spectacles of themselves in church seems to a Lutheran an awful lot like, well, a Democratic convention or rock concert or even a British hooligan stadium.

So temperamentally Lutherans perceive and avoid what they take to be intrusions and preposterousnesses, affectations and obscurantisms, inventions and tempestuous group expressiveness. Average Lutherans vaguely see these as defining practices of other denominations and sects, ethoses that might have their origin in small landlocked territories such as History, Theology, or Reasoning. No need, thank heaven, for a *Summa*. Saved from being "born again"!

Curiously, this average lay clueless Lutheran individual uncannily resembles Holmes. As his friend Dr. Watson put it, in "A Study in Scarlet": "No man burdens his mind with small matters unless he has some very good reason for doing so." Not only did Holmes not know who Thomas Carlyle was, he professed himself actually "ignorant of the Copernican Theory." Assessing Holmes's knowledge of Literature, Philosophy, and Astronomy, Watson had one word: "Nil."

If the three components of the human operating system are Taste, Temperament, and Conditioning, will any of these be waning soon? Not Taste, which in religious matters often refers to music; Lutherans, worshiping always—even if only subliminally—with Bach eavesdropping, ethereal and mathematical, will not drift massively into swoons or huzzahs. Lutherans will keep latching onto lyrics that grow mainly from proof texts, not from flower gardens, unless dark Gethsemane.

Human Temperament and Conditioning won't yield. Temperament is what inexplicably one likes or does not like. You don't really pick and choose; you have your affinities: Gothic architecture, for example, or altar calls, fragrant and costumed ceremony, a yearly series of prescribed readings, transparent plastic lecterns showing off the preacher's tailor, sermons rich with pop culture, Communion every Sunday or seldom, services of spectacular healing, and so forth. Conditioning: Is some of it pre-natal? Did your parents press the Robert Shaw Chorale to the womb? Or was it Duke Ellington? The Grand Old Opry?

But in the big picture, aren't all denominations about the same, also the nondenominations? All have the same Theology (creator God, redeemer Christ) and the same History (that is, all of their fervent teachings, plausible or perverse, are latent somewhere in the Bible). They have committed the same felonies, such as rejection of Sabbath in favor of Sunday. On that ground alone, shouldn't all Christians be Seventh-Day Adventists?

All of their theorists tend to deploy dubious Reasoning, the kind that concerns Updike. It wings from innocent premise to eerie conclusion. Examples: God didn't want the abused and depressed 19th-century working man to fall prey to alcohol, so we continue to use grape juice. Paul baptized the whole household of Cornelius, so we do infants. Jesus didn't appoint women, so we anoint men. Faith alone healed people near Jesus, so unmedicated faith should do it today, since you always have Him near you. Pentecost is the big thing Jesus promised, and since it turned out to be glossolalic frenzy, we honor Him by loud carrying on. But for the average lay nontheorist Theology, History, and Reasoning matter hardly at all. In their marrow, people let Taste, Temperament, and Conditioning decide; it's this TTC imperative that lands individuals in their respective church homes. Like Holmes not doing LPA, average Christians don't—perhaps *can't*—do THR.

So why be a Lutheran in the new millennium? Well, if you like what Lutherans tend to like, and go along with their kinds of avoidances, then take up new millennium Lutheranism, rather similar to the old. As Lutheran, you put up with a minimum of magic and mystification. No revivals, no noise, no discipline of the spirit. No modern incredulities piled on the old ones, no tears except at funerals.

One other thing. Lutheranism has the attraction of being sort of a "pan-European" thing. For a child, those delicious German names—Eisleben, Magdeburg, and the Diet of Worms which even adults found worth a chuckle. Lutherans could be Swedish, Norwegian, Danish, even Finnish ("Suomi," in church literature), while other denominations were provincial. Episcopalians and Methodists were only English, Presbyterians were small cold Scotland, Greek Orthodox was obviously Greece, Roman Catholics were very Italy, and Baptists were Texas swagger or backward Tennessee. We Lutherans—"evangelical," global-minded—felt justified in calling ourselves, with Old Adamic congratulation, the Church Universal.

But that was in the olden days, when it was actually slightly less important to be American than to be right. In crisis, you would place God above nation, or at least the catechism said you would. Right now, in our moment, the whole world, perhaps even Finland and Tennessee, is desperate to become American, and this is how the new millennium differs from the old. Not until the old millennium was 98 percent over, the Berlin Wall in crumbs like the one at Jericho, did the whole world feel massively driven to buy into the American ethos.

The religion for this hegemonic American era is Lutheranism, according to an unprejudiced lapsed Catholic. As experts know, our earliest comprehensive nation-definer is not pragmatic Franklin in his *Autobiography* or idealistic Jefferson in his Declaration of Independence. It's a secular French immigrant named J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, in his 1782 *Letters from*

an American Farmer, especially his most famous chapter, "What Is an American?" The American, Crèvecoeur explained, is the average man, whose original nationality "melts" into all the others, resulting in a new people "whose labors and prosperity will one day cause great changes in the world." That day has come and not gone.

But for present purposes the proof text comes from Crèvecoeur's 1801 *Journey into Northern Pennsylvania and the State of New York*, written in French and not translated into English till 1964. There he observes—and of course the idea is not new, but seldom stated so murkily—that the rapid growth of the American colonies was "due to [overseas] intolerance, to long and bloody wars of religion which desolated England and a great part of Europe in the seventeenth century." Average people, exasperated, got out of there.

"It is probable," he goes on, "that if the new doctrines of Luther and Calvin had not appeared, the basis on which these colonies were founded would have been less favorable to liberty and would not have had such a rapid growth. On what did the silencing of these doctrines hinge for so long a time [previously]? On the fact that Pope Leo X had not [yet] planned to glorify his reign by building the basilica of St. Peter."

That all means that Luther didn't need to be born till the pope wanted money for the biggest church he could imagine. Luther and Calvin objected, on behalf of the average fed-up Euros, emigrating en masse, and so became America's Founding Fathers.

But while the Calvin ethos may be felt in presbyteries here and there, it is not a denomination. You can't join a congregation called St. James Calvinist or Calvinian. Thus to be American anywhere in the world in the new millennium, which is your manifest destiny, you as an average Christian have only one option, however improbable. This is Lutheranism, emergent from distant history but shaped and reformed in the present.

Concerning denominations and the occupations of their adherents, the 1960 census, wrote Ben J. Wattenberg, showed "Lutherans most likely to be craftsmen." Who knows? Maybe that's not merely a time-specific generalization but an enduring metaphor: the skilled maker (in imitation of the ultraskilled Maker) turning out to be at least as useful in shaping an adequate Christianity—effectively deploying taste, temperament, and conditioning—as the theologian, historian, or philosopher.

From Dogwood, yours faithfully,
C.V.

Letters from the Front

breathing o'er Eden, or, " we've only just begun..."

Thomas C. Willadsen

A recent series of letters that appeared in Ann Landers has sparked a lot of controversy. More than the famous "toilet paper over or under the roll" debate of the mid '70s, if you can imagine. It seems that some clergy have begun sounding off about why they hate to perform weddings, and how often they are taken advantage of by couples who are getting married. Often when ministers get together we talk about whether we prefer weddings or funerals and it's nearly unanimous in my circles—funerals over weddings. If that is surprising, I invite the reader to read on.

For some reason I have experienced a boom in the number of couples approaching me to perform their weddings in 2000. I've asked couples whether this year has any special significance for them and they all say it does not. [It seems obvious to me that there is a huge advantage for couples getting married this year—they will always be able to tell how long they've been married. Personally, I have no trouble remembering my wedding anniversary, but have to stop and think to remember the year. For the couple who marries this year, computing how long they have been married will be a snap.] Still, it is an undeniable trend. In 1999 I performed one wedding. Earlier this year for a time I had eight couples scheduled to get married. That number has dwindled to three that are planned. One was postponed; one couple went to another church; one couple broke up and two have simply disappeared.

There are really only three reasons why ministers dislike performing weddings: what happens before the ceremony, the ceremony and what happens after.

The process I use with couples who approach me to perform their weddings begins with a timid call from the bride-to-be.

"Hi, uh, Pastor, you don't know me, but I was baptized in your church and my grandfather was on the trustees forty years ago and uh, I was, wondering, do you do weddings?"

"Congratulations!," I boom cheerfully, "what's your name and who's the lucky fella?"

"His name's Chris and. . .could we do it on June 12?"

"Come on in and we'll talk about it. This is such happy news! Are you nervous?"

"A little, uh. . ."

"...Good! Is Chris? I bet your parents are thrilled. Can you come in Tuesday afternoon?"

Most couples think they can simply schedule a date with the church and that's it. As a Presbyterian I have to meet the couple and assess their maturity, their commitment to Christ and Christian marriage and work with them to plan a ceremony that is comfortable to them and faithful to my tradition. Occasionally couples refuse to go through pre-marital counseling, I don't worry about those couples because I don't see them. The ones I worry about are the ones who are eager to go through it. Usually the eagerness is rooted in the hope that "the pastor will get this doofus to change."

My premarital counseling has three goals: I want to get to know the couple, so what I say during their ceremony will reflect who they are; I want them to get to know me, so when the honeymoon's over they have someone to talk to about their differences; and finally, we plan the ceremony together. I spend the bulk of the time looking at the couple's relationship and family and the household they are creating for the simple reason that weddings are over in 45 min-

The Rev. Mr. Willadsen tries to make sense of weddings in Oshkosh, WI. Funerals take care of themselves.

utes, tops, but marriages are supposed to last forever.

Of the 27 weddings I have performed in nearly nine years of ministry, one that I did not perform stands out most strongly in my memory. The couple started attending my church after moving to an apartment across the street. They had been living together, off and on, for about five years and had a three year old. At our first meeting I started getting to know the couple and my "spider sense" started to tingle. I said, "We might need four sessions to sort through some of the issues in your relationship." The couple had moved around Minnesota a lot. "Which cities?" I asked.

"Well, Stillwater. Then Rochester. Finally St. Peter."

Had I known Minnesota better I would have seen a pattern. Stillwater is where the state prison is and Rochester and St. Peter are sites of regional treatment centers.

They missed the next two sessions we scheduled. I called, but their phone had been disconnected. I wrote a note indicating that they probably could not complete their premarital counseling prior to their intended date; I needed to hear from them.

A few days later I got a phone call from the lucky fella.

"This is Dave."

"Hi Dave."

"Randi said I should call you."

"Really? Why?"

"Uh, to tell you we're not getting married."

"I'm sorry to hear that. Why?"

"I got tired of her shit."

"I don't blame you. Thanks for calling."

A month later I got another call from the couple on a Tuesday. They wanted to get married on Thursday. I met them at Denny's and we talked as they chain smoked and drank coffee. They gave me an ultimatum. If I didn't do their wedding, they were going to a judge. They even had him lined up.

"OK by me."

"But we want a church wedding!"

We compromised. The judge made her "an honest woman", and I agreed to perform a religious ceremony for them after they completed their premarital counseling. They didn't. The last I heard of them, Dave had escaped from St. Peter, called the police and taunted them for being too stupid to find them and been re-arrested. Randi had moved to Minneapolis and was living with a new "honey," to whom she could relate because she's "one third Indian." Her and Dave's love child liked the new honey and did not sleep with his shoes. He slept with Dave's shoes from a young age so that Dave would have to awaken him before leaving home in the middle of the night.

More than 90 percent of the couples I have married were living together at the time of their wedding. Studies show that these couples are slightly more likely to divorce. While the researchers disagree on exactly why this is true, some argue that it is because couples who live together have not had to make a deep, dramatic commitment, which would help them to work together to weather difficult times that all couples experience. Statistically, that may be true, but I can remember another couple who needed a "small step approach" to making a commitment.

In the same way that some people get into a swimming pool one toe at a time, this couple worked to deepen their relationship gradually and carefully. Because of their family histories they knew that they would both have to work to build trust. Moving in together was a step for them, as was beginning sexual relations, as was getting married. Because of them and their seriousness, honesty and maturity, I cringe when I hear of churches refusing to marry couples who live together prior to marriage.

During premarital counseling I talk about being allies. I am their ally in leading a ceremony that is meaningful to them. More importantly I make them see that they need to be each other's ally. Whether their war is with the caterer, their siblings or parents, I try to get them to use the planning of the ceremony itself as a trial run of their marital alliance.

I also talk about the fact that they might get stage fright [which is different from cold feet], that their families might freak out over something minor, that their wedding will not be perfect and that planning a ceremony where they celebrate their love, and are surrounded by their families and closest friends should be fun. Great fun. Extreme fun. If stress is making it less than fun, I tell them to put the planner away for

a few days.

Wedding planners and bridal magazines add to the stress of getting married, in my opinion. Most of them irritate me because of their emphasis on parts of a wedding day that are less than essential. *The Best of Martha Stewart's Living: Weddings* for example, devotes ten pages to stationery, thirteen to cakes and four to ceremonies. *Bride's Wedding Planner* has fourteen pages on "Your Wedding Flowers" and eleven on "Planning Your Ceremony." One topic it addresses is "choosing your officiant."

Modern Bride Magazine, April/May, 2000 is over 600 pages of gloss, mostly ads for designer gowns and honeymoon hideaways. [If this embarrassing pain I'm feeling turns out to be a hernia, I will blame the research I did in this magazine.] (Tom, as an independent contractor, the law forbids you from making a claim against *The Cresset*, but we might send you flowers. GME) An article on how to manage pre-wedding stress includes this advice: "Stop at your house of worship first. If you're planning a religious ceremony, you'll want to be sure the date you want is open before you start searching for caterers."

Marc A. Giedinghagen, author of *Ritefully Wed* says that weddings are often seen as "speed bumps" on the way to the reception, which captures perfectly the spirit of most couples on their wedding day.

Ceremonies are a unique challenge to ministers. There are so many people who need to be in the right place and begin processing at the right time, so many logistical details to have in place before the ceremony begins. The Presbyterian Book of Order says, "As a service of Christian worship, the marriage service is under the direction of the minister." Unfortunately, organists, mothers of the bride, maids of honor and professional wedding consultants are not bound by the Book of Order. Often I approach differences of opinion over what should happen in the ceremony by saying to the bride, loudly, "What do you want?" Sometimes I have to say, "Yes, that would be lovely, but it's your daughter's decision, don't you think?"

Personally, I hate the "border collie" side of doing weddings most of all.

"O.K. after your step-mother's mother is escorted in by, what's your name again? then we will have his father's favorite aunt, and which of your cousins is escorting her? Good, and this is the music that will be playing as you do all this—Hit it, Carol!!. . ."

By the time they are standing in front of the church, many couples are so dazed from all the details they have already attended to that they simply cannot pay attention to the ceremony. I remember one bride who stood with a blank look on her face after the kiss, the announcement and the benediction.

"Go," I whispered.

Nothing.

"Leave now," a little louder.

Nothing.

"Ralph," (an appeal to her husband of three minutes), "do something."

Nothing.

"Bust a move."

Perhaps it was her minister's quoting a rap song by Young MC that finally broke her reverie; they recessed to applause.

At every wedding I make a different mistake. Having done nearly thirty I am forced to be creative in my mistaking. The first wedding I did I asked the ushers to light the candles in the front of the sanctuary. They lit the Unity Candle. I didn't notice, until the happy couple and their children from previous marriages surrounded the Unity Candle, lit their tapers off it, looked at each other, shrugged and blew them out. Bad symbolism. Ever since I've told the ushers that the Unity Candle is special. And I've found other mistakes to make.

Following the wedding there is usually an awkward moment when someone who should not invites me to the reception. Some couples do think to invite me and my wife to the reception, but many do not. As a general rule, I avoid wedding receptions. Try going to a party sometime where you know only two people, both of whom need to spend time with other people. Then imagine that at this party everyone knows that you're a minister, and that is the *only* thing they know about you. Chances are no one is going to talk to you about the pennant races or the latest Tom Wolfe tome. The only person who enjoys this situation less is the minister's spouse.

Of all the marriages I have performed I know of only one divorce. There are probably others, I have only heard of one. Over the years

my frustration with couples seeing their weddings as speed bumps has made me think long and hard about what I and the congregation I serve can do to increase the investment of the congregation, the couple and me, in weddings I perform.

Starting this month, couples who are getting married at First Presbyterian Church have a new requirement. They must attend worship, come forward during the pastoral prayer to be prayed over and stay for coffee hour. My hope is that this will help the couples see that they are part of the worshipping community and the congregation will know that part of their mission is to support families, especially new families, in our midst. I added the coffee hour part because I know that these couples will be mobbed—tastefully, we're Presbyterian—by people who wish them happiness and joy. It brings a tear to my eye imagining it.

Even though I have good reason to be skeptical, if not cynical, about "the wedding industry," I remain hopeful about marriage in general. The marriage ceremony I use calls marriage a gift from God and a "holy mystery." The faith I see in couples who decide to get married, given the courage that marriage requires in this age, is heartening. Those couples who come to the church to get married recognize that they cannot make and keep their promises without the help of God and the community of faith. They know that love is *not* never having to say you're sorry. It's about forgiving and forgiving and needing forgiveness. And building an alliance. And trust. And laughing together. Couples who recognize their love as a mysterious gift from a generous God and their wedding as a response to this gift are not "speed bumped" on their way to their reception, but welcomed home by a loving God and faithful community.

READER, LEVEL TWO

For every book a star,
and for every star a measure
closer to the end of the page
that you must fill to reach
the end. And when you reach
the end, then we will begin
another page that we will fill
with stars spangling bright as words
that sound about our heads
in the night room where we read
with no beginning and no end.

Lynnell Edwards

Books

Peter Novick. *The Holocaust in American Life.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999, 373 pp.

I teach the Holocaust and work in the burgeoning scholarly field of Holocaust Studies, so I was prepared not to like this book. Early media attention presented *The Holocaust in American Life* as the latest entry in a growing genre of "controversial" studies that deny the Holocaust's uniqueness, challenge its conventional interpretation, or question its privileged cultural status. These books trade on the Holocaust's notoriety to create their own, but rarely realize the "groundbreaking" or "controversial" character celebrated by their publishers. But *The Holocaust in American Life* is done a disservice by being classed with these books, for it is well-reasoned, clear, informative, and controversial in the best sense. Peter Novick presents a careful historical account of the evolution of Holocaust consciousness in this country, an account he hopes will "provoke discussion." And it has the potential to do so because, unlike many historical texts on the Holocaust, it is eminently readable. The notes are unobtrusive; the prose elegant; the chapters brief and thematically coherent. Novick's overarching concern is whether the prominent role played by the Holocaust in "both American Jewish and general American" discourse is a desirable development. Thus, throughout the book Novick addresses two different audiences. As a Jew, he is concerned by the American prominence of the Holocaust, and the Jew-equals-victim equation that it implies. He is aware of American culture's changing attitude toward victimhood, which has become central to the assertion of a distinctive identity. And he recognizes that as "virtually the only common denominator of American Jewish identity in the late twentieth century, [the Holocaust] has filled a need for a consensual symbol" (7). But Novick laments that the Holocaust has been associated with an inward and rightward turn of American Jewry in recent decades, and he is critical of Jewish insistence on the Holocaust's uniqueness. Novick's broader audience is Americans of all backgrounds, to whom he presents a series of observations about the developing role of the Holocaust in American social discourse. These observations contribute to some crucial questions with regard to the Holocaust's prominence in American life: how did it happen, what does it mean, and is it good for us?

The book's twelve chapters are divided into five parts arranged chronologically: "The War Years," "The Postwar Years," "The Years of Transition," "Recent Years," and "Future Years." Chapters are titled after quotations that reflect American developments in understanding and interpreting the Holocaust: "We Knew in a General Way"; "That is Past, and We Must Deal with the Facts Today"; "Would They Hide My Children?," and so on. Novick confesses at the outset that this study began "in curiosity and skepticism." Why, Novick wondered, more than fifty years after the liberation of the death camps of Europe, had the Holocaust come to loom so large in American culture? To the questions why *now* (the 1990s) and why *here* (the United States), Novick explores many possible answers. In the process he is aided by the concept of collective memory, the idea that present concerns determine what we remember of the past. As Novick puts it: "We embrace a memory because it speaks to our condition; to the extent that we embrace it, we establish a framework for interpreting that condition" (170).

With this concept in mind, Novick reminds us that "the Holocaust" was not a distinctive thing until the 1970s. This fact is significant both terminologically—when used during or immediately after World War II, the word "holocaust" did not refer specifically to Jewish deaths—and substantively. For a variety of reasons military and cultural, at the time Americans did not view the fate of European Jews apart from the chaos of global war. To make this point Novick quotes William Casey, then head of European intelligence for the OSS, who confessed that "the appalling magnitude of [Jewish victimization]. . . wasn't sufficiently real to stand out from the general brutality and slaughter which is war" (24). Novick argues this was just as true for American Jews (especially those who had been in America for a while, were sensitive to domestic anti-Semitism, and supported FDR), who were more committed

to building a Jewish homeland in Palestine than to rescuing Europe's Jews.

In the immediate postwar period, comprehension of the Nazi "Final solution" was delayed by a widespread "immunity to shock" and by the perception that Nazi atrocities had been aimed at political opponents of the Third Reich. American reports of the liberation of Nazi concentration and death camps treated Jews as being *among* the Nazis' victims, nothing more. This was in part because Jews did not figure prominently among those liberated from camps within Germany. Significantly, the common postwar designation for a survivor of Nazi aggression was "DP" (displaced person); the specifically Jewish term "Holocaust survivor" did not arise until much later. While about 100,000 Jewish survivors of Nazism lived in America by the early 1950s, they tended to be silent about their European experiences. Few Americans were interested in hearing about them; and they were instructed to look to the future. The status of victim had not come to be prized in America, and Jews were concerned that the victim image portrayed Jews as weak.

The postwar years in America were upbeat; anti-Semitic discourse virtually disappeared from the public realm, and Jews were integrationist in outlook. What attention there was to the Holocaust focused on the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, or the successful postwar lives of survivors, both of which transmitted universal lessons concerning the indomitable human spirit or the psychological roots of prejudice. For the optimistic 1950s, the perfect literary expression of the Holocaust was *The Diary of Anne Frank*, its popularity evidence that "every generation frames the Holocaust. . .in ways that suit its mood" (120).

Novick concludes that "by the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s, talk of the Holocaust was something of an embarrassment in American public life" (85). With the advent of the Cold War, symbols portraying Nazism as the apotheosis of evil were no longer functional. The category of "totalitarianism" was invoked as a response to shifting global political alignments and memories of Nazi crimes received an anti-Soviet cast. Communism was now the mortal enemy of American democracy, and fascism became ancient history. Novick observes that the Holocaust was the province of the Jewish left during this period, and was featured most prominently in Communist and pro-Communist rhetoric. Mainstream Judaism, meanwhile, sought to dissociate itself from Communism and its anti-fascist Holocaust rhetoric. In 1957 one student of American Judaism concluded that "the murder of Europe's Jews has not strongly affected the basic pattern of thought and feeling of Jews in the United States" (105). Commemorations were rare; no monuments or memorials were constructed. In 1961, contributors to published symposia in the leading Jewish journals *Commentary* and *Judaism* made scant reference to "the Holocaust."

During this period, Novick concludes, "the Holocaust was a private, albeit widely shared, Jewish sorrow. Without official sanction, it could not become a public communal emblem; without official reinforcement, it tended, at least for many, to decline in salience" (98). In the postwar period, the Holocaust was the "wrong atrocity" for contemporary purposes. It was "historicized"; and thus could not attain "transcendent status as the bearer of eternal truths or lessons. . ." (110). For the time being, in fact, Hiroshima was the symbol that defined the present and future for Americans.

The "years of transition" (the early 1960s) saw a loosening of cold war culture in which constraints on talking about the Holocaust were relaxed. While the possibility of backlash from the Israeli trial of Adolf Eichmann worried American Jews, it represented the first time "the Holocaust" (an Israeli term at this time) was presented to the American public as a distinct entity. The controversies provoked by Hannah Arendt's book *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1963) and Rolf Hochhuth's play *The Deputy* (1964)—which highlighted Pope Pius XII's silence in the face of Jewish suffering—"broke fifteen years of near silence on the Holocaust in American public discourse" (144).

Still it was not until the late 1960s and early 1970s that the role of the Holocaust in American life was transformed. In Novick's analysis, the 1967 Six Day War provided the dramatic turning point in this transformation, for it reoriented the agenda of organized American Jewry, offered a folk theology of "Holocaust and Redemption," and eventually (particularly in the wake of the Yom Kippur War of 1973) aided the Holocaust's institutionalization in American life. "In a set of spiraling interactions, concern with Israel was expressed in ways that evoked the Holocaust, and vice versa" (146). The situation in the Middle East Novick views as crucial to understanding the Holocaust's role in American life:

> As American Jewish leaders sought to understand the reasons for Israel's isolation and vulnerability. . . the explanation commanding the widest support was that the fading of the memories of Nazism's crimes against the Jews, and the arrival on the scene of a generation ignorant of the Holocaust, had resulted in Israel's losing the support it had once enjoyed (153).

This explanation led to massive "Holocaust programming" by American Jewish organizations, some of it intended to mobilize support for Israel among Jews, the American public, and within the American government. Ironically, Novick argues, in the 1980s and 90s, when concern with Israel's security declined and it became difficult to perceive the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in black-and-white terms, attention to the Holocaust increased among American Jews, for it "offered a substitute symbol of infinitely greater moral clarity" (169).

Another force that enhanced the stature of the Holocaust in American life was the growing perception that a "new antisemitism" was emerging. The perception that Jew-hatred was increasing at home made the Holocaust "emblematic of an eternal Jewish condition" (173) and gave rise to the conviction that it could happen in America. Since genocide was regarded as the inevitable result of cultural anti-Semitism, some American Jews wondered if their non-Jewish neighbors would be willing to hide them when the crisis came. Intermarriage was sometimes referred to as a "silent" Holocaust, and the attenuation of Jewish identity among the young was a seen as a result of insufficient Holocaust awareness. In the 1970s, Holocaust courses at colleges and universities were successful in attracting Jewish students who otherwise had little interest in Jewish life. Novick stresses that the Holocaust has moved from the margins to the center of American Jewish consciousness, "as a consequence of decisions made by communal leaders in response to their appraisals of current communal needs. . ." (202). Both the right and the left found the Holocaust useful, which seemed to hold "something for everyone."

In Part Three—"Recent Years"—Novick discusses a series of events that have kept the Holocaust in the news since the late 1970s: the neo-Nazi march in Skokie, Illinois; President Reagan's visit to Bitburg in 1985; the Kurt Waldheim affair in 1986; the controversy over the Carmelite convent at Auschwitz; the Justice Department's program of identifying and deporting former Nazi criminals living in this country. But Novick regards as the threshold moment in public consciousness of the Holocaust the April 1978 broadcast of the NBC miniseries *Holocaust*, which attracted close to 100 million viewers. Soon after the airing of *Holocaust,* President Jimmy Carter announced he would establish a commission to explore the creation of a national memorial to those killed in the Holocaust. Novick views the debate over what form the memorial should take, and who it should memorialize, as a chief example of the ambiguity, confusion and uncertainty that has come to characterize American discourse on the Holocaust. As the story of the Washington Holocaust museum indicates, virtually everything one can say or symbolize about the tragedy is inscribed in political controversy.

Today awareness of the Holocaust is greater than ever—97% of Americans know what the Holocaust is, and a majority of those polled in 1990 called the Holocaust "*the* worst tragedy in history." But is the proliferation of Holocaust consciousness a good thing? Does the Holocaust sensitize us to other, lesser atrocities? Novick reviews American responses to episodes of genocide from the Nigerian civil war of the late 1960s to the Bosnian war of the early 1990s to show that when Holocaust imagery was applied to these conflicts it was not a spur to action. In the case of Bosnia, Novick concludes: "It's not clear that invoking the Holocaust was, on balance, a rhetorical asset" (254), which leads him to wonder if the Holocaust may actually desensitize us to subsequent suffering by raising the threshold of outrage. And what of the "lessons of the Holocaust" we hear so much about in contemporary discourse? Novick regards most of these purported lessons as "empty, and not very useful." To argue his point, Novick reviews a litany of contemporary issues in which the Holocaust's "lessons" are divined, led by the socalled American Holocaust of legalized abortion. Invariably, Novick observes, American social discourse brings lessons *to* the Holocaust rather than drawing them from it. Yet "the very characteristics of the Holocaust that make it an appealing illustration of this or that lesson make it a dubious source of lessons" (244). A further problem with these "lessons" is how bland they turn out to be when they are communicated to the public. Novick is understandably skeptical of the "sort of pithy lessons that fit on a bumper sticker," and wonders whether, when the Holocaust is part of a larger initiative in moral education,

the lessons get much beyond bumper sticker quality. For any valuable lessons to be learned, he maintains, the past must be encountered in all its messy complexity.

In Part Five—"Future Years"—Novick considers the future of Holocaust consciousness in America. He argues that while the Shoah remains sacred in American "folk Judaism," the Jewish drive to "center the Holocaust" is declining. The need to expand Holocaust consciousness to combat denial or "revisionism" Novick calls absurd. And what of the slow but inevitable disappearance of Holocaust survivors? Though this will no doubt diminish the emotional power of Holocaust remembrance, commemoration has become very institutionalized. Since "Holocaust institutions, like all institutions, create their own momentum," Holocaust consciousness will survive even without the survivors.

Novick concludes *The Holocaust in American Life* with messages for both his general and Jewish readership. He asks Jews to reconsider Emil Fackenheim's claim that they should embrace Judaism in the wake of the Holocaust in order to deny Hitler any posthumous victories: "But it would be an even greater posthumous victory for Hitler," Novick writes, "were we to tacitly endorse his definition of ourselves as despised pariahs by making the Holocaust emblematic of Jewish experience" (281). For Americans in general Novick counsels that the Holocaust is too remote from our experience to function as a worthwhile collective memory: "In the United States, memory of the Holocaust is so banal, so inconsequential, not memory at all, precisely because it is so uncontroversial, so unrelated to real divisions in American society, so *apolitical*"(279).

This book makes for very interesting reading. Throughout, Novick delights in debunking popular myths, including the notion that America and her allies could have done much more to save Jews from their Nazi killers. Novick demonstrates that American Jewish organizations did not clamor for allied operations against death camps, and reminds us that the political and military decisions of the time were made without foreknowledge of "the Holocaust." Another misconception he attacks is that postwar support for the State of Israel resulted from western guilt for the Holocaust. Novick finds no evidence that this was true either in American politics or among religious groups, whether Jewish or Christian. Finally, Novick reveals that the "eleven million" figure that is routinely cited as the number of Holocaust victims (Jewish and non-Jewish) was simply invented by Simon Wiesenthal in the late 1970s.

But the book does have flaws. For instance, Novick underestimates the role of Christian individuals and organizations in the American fascination with the Holocaust. While he does briefly discuss the "relatively small group of Christians [who] have devoted themselves to addressing the Holocaust as a specifically Christian problem," Novick writes misleadingly that "America's cause has never much concerned the American public. . ." (166). Novick also plays down the strength and significance of anti-Jewish sentiment in America, while at the same time ascribing the Holocaust's stature in society to the fact that "Jews play an important and influential role" in Hollywood, television, and the publishing worlds. Without doubt some will accuse Novick of encouraging those who see Jews as moving the levers of power in America.

Still, *The Holocaust in American Life* is more engaging and informative than many similar books. It certainly promises to provoke the discussion its author seeks.

Stephen R. Haynes

on poets—

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freelances as a health and travel writer. She is in training to become a California Poet in the Schools, and teaches poetry for homeless children on a volunteer basis at a school in her area.

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PERIODICALS
POSTAGE
PAID